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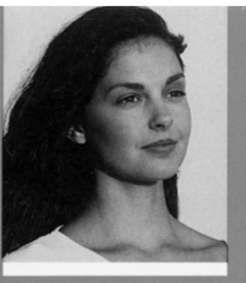

Volume 50
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Gerd Gemünden
Alice Kuzniar
Klaus Phillips

From *Taboo Parlor* to Porn and Passing

An Interview with Monika Treut

Recently there have been ever more feature films that portray positive, sympathetic images of lesbians—from *The Incredibly True Adventure of Two Girls in Love* to *Go Fish* and *Bar Girls*. The days are fortunately gone when the lesbian was relegated to the role of old spinster, mannish bore, crazed murderess, or lusting vampire. Even *Bound* glamourously rewrites the noir story of the killer dyke. But long before the term "New Queer Cinema" was invoked to designate this wave of recent films, Hamburg filmmaker Monika Treut was in the business of portraying same-sex desires between women (who often do not self-identify as lesbians, bi, femme, or whatever) with flair, humor, and the courage to buck stereotypes. She provides her expanding fandom—growing in part because of the ready availability of her works in most video stores—with affirmative images of strong women who explore their sexuality in unconventional ways.

Even before Judith Butler theorized the element of performance in gender role-playing, Monika Treut demonstrated the way in which sexuality is staged, beginning with her first film, *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1985). Codirected with Germany's renowned camerawoman, Elfi Mikesch, this fictional film explores the S/M spectacles enacted at the waterfront gallery of the dominatrix Wanda. The title itself was borrowed from Treut's Ph.D. dissertation, *Die Grausame Frau* (*The Cruel Woman*, forthcoming in English translation from Routledge), about masochism in the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Treut's subsequent feature films are *Virgin Machine* (1988; including Susie Bright, alias Sexpert, among the cast) and *My Father Is Coming* (1991; starring another of America's renowned sex authorities, Annie Sprinkle). While *Virgin Machine* depicts a young, curious woman from Germany exploring lesbian strip joints in San Francisco, *My Father Is Coming*—although also focusing on a similar character's experiencing of queer attractions for both another woman and a female-to-male transsexual—takes a rare, comic look at an older man's rediscovery of sexual interests.

Monika Treut joins an impressive list of German directors who have daringly investigated queer desires, including Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Ulrike

Female to male:
Monika Treut

© Elfi Mikesch, 1990

Ottinger, Werner Schroeter, and Rosa von Praunheim. Of these directors, she is the youngest and, like Praunheim, has shot a significant part of her work in the United States. In fact, *Female Misbehavior*, another one of her feature-length films, is a compilation of four short documentary interviews (shot between 1983 and 1992) with unquestionably American women: Camille Paglia; Annie Sprinkle, an S/M practicing lesbian; and Max, a female-to-male pre-op transsexual.

The occasion for our talking to Monika Treut about her work and the problems faced by an independent film-maker first arose in April 1995 at a film conference at Hollins College, where she was a visiting professor. At that time we asked her about her admiration for Camille Paglia, the difference between the production and reception of her work in Germany and the United States, and her relation to other queer German film-makers and the American avant-garde. In addition, we were curious to know more about a short work, *Taboo Parlor*, which had just been released as part of a Hollywood-produced omnibus film, *Erotique*. For this venture, four women film-makers (the others being Lizzie Borden [U.S.A.], Clara Law [Hong Kong], and Ana Maria Magalhaes [Brazil]) were asked to depict a female erotic fantasy. As Treut explains in this interview, the Brazilian director was forced out of the project. Treut's own contribution involved a lesbian couple who pick up a man at a bar, take him home to their apartment for a threesome, and challenge his masculinity—his phallic dominance and readiness for sexual experimentation.

Our conversations with the film-maker were updated when, in the summer of 1996, Alice Kuzniar met with Monika Treut in Hamburg, and when we talked to her during her three-month appointment as visiting professor at Vassar College during the fall. Here we discussed the progress on her more recent projects, one of which is *The Virility Factor*, her ambitious plan for a feature-length futuristic film, loosely based on the novel by French writer Robert Merle. Another project, now nearing completion, is a documentary about a 50-year-old dominatrix from New York, Eva Norvind, which is scheduled for international release later this year.

Do you see your films as contributing to gay and lesbian identity politics, and how would you see these politics as different in the United States than in Germany?

MONIKA TREUT: I think there is a tremendous difference between European and American gays and lesbians. Personally, I'm not very much in love with the identity concept, because I think it's somewhat restrictive—the idea that people have a single identity. We have so many different parts and we're made up of so many pieces that it's difficult to say "I'm a lesbian" to describe a self. What I have trouble with in this country is the whole discussion about minorities and political correctness. Everybody now has a name: the overweight people are the "gravitationally challenged people"; handicapped people are "physically challenged." This labeling gives them a sense of false identity, be it via sexuality or ethnicity or bodily appearance.

How is this different from Germany?

The gay and lesbian scene is different there because they don't have to be as political as gays and lesbians here. Homosexuality in Germany is not as big an offense as it is in some areas of the United States. I'm not sure why this is so; I think there are many different reasons. One of them is that after the Third Reich, and with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, people have become very sensitive—have had to be very sensitive—when defining others as outcasts. The legal situation in the F.R.G. has been more open compared to other countries, at least since the 1960s. That's why we never had to have such a strong political gay movement. There is less repression, or at least less open repression.

Your films convey the message that the more interesting gay culture is to be found in the U.S. Is this because puritanism creates stronger dissenting minorities, and thus fosters gay cultures that are more vibrant and more visible?

Yes, that's the interesting aspect of American gay culture. There is more vitality, more eccentricity, more exhibitionism. For example, in Germany we don't have the tradition of parades, the open display of drag queens that you find, for instance, in the San Francisco Gay Parade. But in Europe there has always been a queer tradition that was very sophisticated, decadent, and at the same time more accepted by mainstream society. Rainer Werner Fassbinder is a good example. But of course there is a danger in glamorizing this decadent European past; and of course one has to bear in mind that it has been prominently a gay *male* culture.

My Father Is Coming

Why do the protagonists of Virgin Machine *and* My Father Is Coming *move to San Francisco and New York? Do you see the United States as a queer utopia?*

Those two places come closest to a queer utopia within the U.S. In their rural hometowns the characters may not fare too well.

Would you agree that, in the present political climate, to make films about gays and lesbians always means making a political statement?

Certainly a film like *Philadelphia* was a political event. However, there are movies like Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* that just have gay characters in them without making a political statement. I think in this country the issue is over-politicized—the scandals about lesbians in soap operas where two women kiss. I understand that this means something to certain people, but only if you give TV a lot of power over people's minds. I personally refuse to take seriously what they show me in a soap opera. Perhaps I'm just blocking and don't want to see how important this is. Do you think it's important for America to have lesbian characters on prime-time TV?

Yes, it's important to have that (tele)visibility, except the threat here is that it could easily reinforce stereotypes.

In Germany it is almost the other way around. Sometimes when you switch on the TV you have one gay show after the other. The Schmidt Theatre in Hamburg, for instance, is an example of a gay theater that has its own show on local TV. Much of it is gay kitsch, with flowered wallpaper. One of the characters occasionally wears a giant condom on his head and talks about how he is in love with the soccer players of the local team—and nobody cares. It's hard to imagine that in this country.

Why are you making most of your films in the United States? Do you think you can have more of an impact here as a lesbian film-maker?

I wish you wouldn't label me a lesbian filmmaker. The only adjective I wouldn't mind would be "good." There are several reasons why I prefer to work in the U.S. I have a greater choice of crew and cast, especially in New York and California. There's a TV industry but no film industry in postwar Germany. Most of the good German professionals make their living by working for TV. They all get union wages, which I can't afford to pay since I'm mostly working with small budgets. German crews hardly care for projects off the beaten track.

Like so many contemporary German film-makers, your films have been much better received in the U.S. than at home.

Yes, I feel that people in this country are more interested in my work and take it more seriously. I aim for an international audience. And the reason I survive in the business is because my films appeal to audiences from different cultures. Apart from the U.S., I have an audience in England, Holland, Australia, Canada, and now also in France. That's why I shoot in English—to have greater access to different markets.

To what extent do you see yourself fulfilling a didactic function with your films, trying to enlighten, inform, or confront your viewers?

I wish to entertain and thereby induce thinking. I don't make movies to challenge anyone. However, once in a while I have a heartwarming experience. For example, after the screening of one of my films a young woman—maybe 22 years old, heavily tattooed, and with all kinds of jewelry in her face—came up to me. She thanked me and had tears in her eyes as she told me of seeing *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* five years ago, and of feeling very unsure of her sexual orientation and her sexual preferences, but so supported by this film, that she was not alone. She was entering this S/M fantasy world and felt empowered by the movie to leave her insecurities behind.

Maybe the only group I wanted to challenge with *Virgin Machine* was uptight lesbians—which I only realized after the movie was finished; I think it worked in a way. I had the idea to inch a lesbian prostitute in there to challenge the view that lesbian sex is warm and human. It's sex like every other kind.

With *My Father Is Coming*, I wanted to reach out to straight people, and open them up through the character of the father, who has a relationship with Annie Sprinkle. Annie herself is kind of ambiguous; she's bisexual, and she is in touch with prostitutes and transsexuals.

What kind of reactions have you had to your provocative representations of lesbians, bisexuals, and S/M people?

To me my films are not provocative, even though some people, especially straight men, seem to think so. However, the immobile section of society seems to feel threatened by some of the things they see in my films because they fear for their established position. Open-minded people feel a whiff of fresh air. There was strong opposition by some straight men to most of my movies.

Female Misbehavior

So it's a group that you do want to offend, then, in certain ways?

Not necessarily, no. When I make a movie I don't start with a preconceived notion. When Elfi Mikesch and I first showed *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* at the Berlin Film Festival we had about 20 people, mostly men, talking to us after the show. They attacked Ulrich Gregor, the festival organizer, for choosing the movie. I guess they were most uncomfortable with what was shown because the portrayal of psychological aspects of sadomasochistic relationships is so rare.

In *Seduction* we have Udo Kier playing the masochist. We also have a male journalist who wants to be the dominatrix's toilet, which is why a few journalists in the audience almost puked. Although they never articulated that, they never said, This is why we don't like the movie. They were just offended.

I think North American men are more open—not necessarily working-class men, but liberal and educated men are more influenced by feminism in this country, so they are more aware that they, especially white males, are part of the "power troopers" and are more intimidated about speaking up about certain issues, whereas German men don't care at all.

How do you feel about German directors whose works deal with gay and lesbians such as Rosa von Praunheim, Werner Schroeter, or Ulrike Ottinger? Do you see yourself in the same group as them?

I'm friends with all of them; perhaps with Rosa it's more of a love-hate relationship. I absolutely adore the work of Werner Schroeter, who now works primarily as a theater director in Cologne and Düsseldorf. It's a shame that he's not making more films, and that it is so difficult for him to raise money.

I think we are a group, whether we acknowledge this or not. We meet at the same film festivals. But since the funding situation is so tough we are also in constant competition with each other, whether we want it or not. Especially since funds are drying up—there is talk now about dissolving the ARD, the oldest public German television station and one of the main money sources for independent film-making—the situation is quite grim at the moment.

How do you finance your films?

I'm still in the fortunate position of being able to raise funds in Germany. However, the Hamburg Filmbüro, which has always supported independent film-makers, just collapsed. Getting funds from federal or state sources is difficult, because they don't look at a film-maker's international reputation—only at how one's films are doing in Germany.

There's the beginning of a national cinema these

days; relatively big-budget comedies, which only do well inside of Germany and hardly get distribution in other countries, are favored. It's probably because German humor is not necessarily an export item.

Besides sharing the experience of competing for funding, and presenting your works at festivals, are there aesthetic overlaps between you and Schroeter or Fassbinder?

I've been influenced by German public TV of the 1970s. That was the best era of German TV, when on the so-called Third Channels you could watch, on a given night, a double feature of Fassbinder's *Satansbraten* and Schroeter's *Eika Katappa*. That's what I did as a teenager, especially since there were no art-house movie theaters at the time. I loved Godard and Fassbinder, and Herzog's *Land of Darkness and Silence* and *Stroszek*—I was just a fan of the New German Cinema. Perhaps *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* has some links to Fassbinder. It was first picked up in Australia by Michael McLernon, who was a longtime collaborator of Fassbinder—apparently he saw a relationship between *Seduction* and Fassbinder's films.

How about other influences, like Andy Warhol or John Waters?

I always loved John Waters' films. Especially his early works like *Female Trouble*. I also like Paul Morrissey—*Mixed Blood* for instance.

Let's turn to a different issue, namely your relation to feminism: You've characterized your work as postfeminist, and that strikes certain people here in America as a very reactionary term to use, especially now that the U.S. government is talking about rescinding affirmative action and so forth.

It's perhaps just a mix-up of terms. I would use it the same way one speaks of postmodernism. Postfeminism would then just mean the next wave of feminism.

In an interview you described postfeminism as a feminism that learned from earlier mistakes of the movement. What kind of mistakes were you referring to?

One of the biggest mistakes was to be antipornography—the whole notion that women are victimized by books, films, and so forth. Feminists thus aligned themselves with moralist, religious, fundamentalist right-wing censors. They walked in the wrong direction entirely. They should have focused instead on the fact that women are still practically barefoot and pregnant; they should have dealt with social situations,

Annie Sprinkle in "Annie," from *Female Misbehavior*

"Taboo Parlor," from *Erotique*

work relations, economic relations. The whole movement became sidetracked. Camille Paglia is whipping this point, and she's absolutely right about that.

Yes, it is evident how you and Paglia would agree here. But Paglia also has the tendency to get applause from the wrong corner.

But that's not her fault, is it?

But she's playing into it. And she also has a very essentialist view of human sexuality, which seems very regressive.

Well, she's opened a window on stuffy perceptions, and I always appreciate the influx of fresh air. Paglia's trademark is to go overboard. One important subject she stresses is that there is a huge biological difference between men and women—she is right. That's another thing that feminists just threw out of the window: they claim that there are no such influences as testosterone and estrogen on the human body. Paglia brings these things back into the discussion. Of course, she also says weird things like, "If women ruled the world, we would still live in grass huts." But that's just rhetoric.

How did you get interested in Camille Paglia?

I met her before she became a media persona and I was immediately fascinated by her. Right away I had the urge to put her on-screen. After her book came out in 1990 and she started appearing on talk shows, I thought she would be out there maybe for two years. And it's amazing that she's still out there, that she's maintaining her obsessive energy. I think she is really important. And I'm still annoyed with some of my American feminist lesbian friends—when they asked me what I was doing, I said I'm presently doing a portrait of Camille Paglia. And they were taken aback and couldn't believe it. They never read her book, they just heard Rush Limbaugh say that he agrees with her. They attacked me for doing a portrait of this woman. Why is it so hard for American feminists to accept an eccentric, obsessive woman?

We wanted to come back to the issue of pornography. There aren't really any pornographic scenes in your films. As an advocate of pornography, is there a reason why you're not more pornographic? The lesbian love-making scene in Virgin Machine, *for instance, is very stylized. Is there a reason for that?*

I'm not an advocate of pornography, I'm an advocate of the freedom of expression. One reason why I don't have elaborate pornographic scenes in my movies is very pragmatic: I really want my films to be distributed internationally, and the rules and regulations differ significantly from place to place. Also, I'm not against different marketing vehicles. If you're

going to a movie theater you're not going to see a pornographic movie—for that you go to a video store. A lot of people are embarrassed to see a porn film in a regular movie theater; they'd rather see it in the privacy of their home. Furthermore, if I were to make a porn film I would want to have a decent budget. Porn films are usually very low budget—shot in one day, with actors one doesn't necessarily want to work with. People who are not in the film industry are often not aware of the different rules of the porn industry versus independent film.

Don't you want to break the rules?

I don't believe in breaking rules just for the sake of breaking rules.

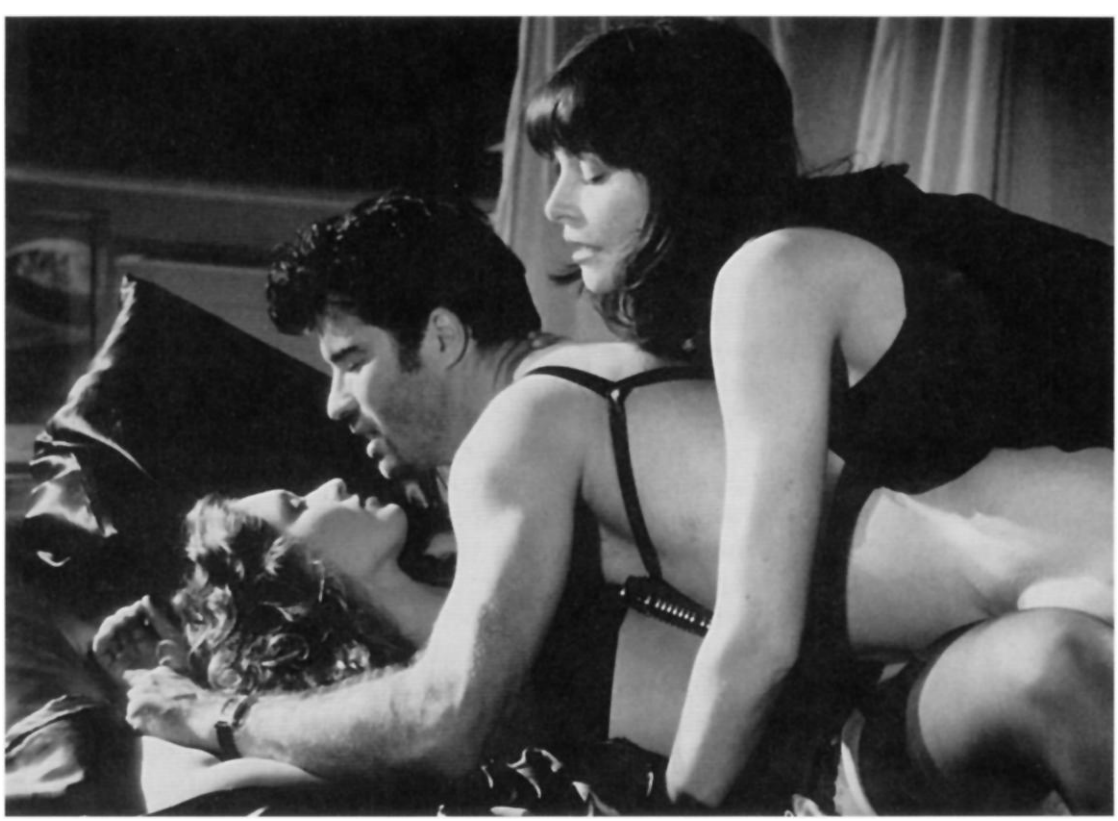
Have you ever thought about what kind of film you would make if you were free of these constraints?

I don't think that way. I'm very pragmatic. I just think about the things I can make, otherwise I wouldn't get them done.

Let's talk about one of your recent films, Taboo Parlor. *What was the concept behind the omnibus film* Erotique, *of which* Taboo Parlor *is one part?*

Our feeling as film-makers was that the producers were not quite clear on what they actually wanted. They were just intrigued by the success of movies such as *Like Water for Chocolate* or Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Lovers*. So they thought, "Hmmh, why don't we do something from the female perspective and from different cultures; that could be a really big box-office hit." The idea is not so bad, especially considering that the film-makers—Lizzie Borden, Clara Law, Ana Maria Magalhaes, and myself—came from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, Magalhaes brought a masochistic aspect into the movie.

It was later we found out that the minds of the Hollywood producers were set on creating some kind of exploitation movie. They had problems with my part because they expected more nudity, more tits and ass. Instead, I parodied pornography. The man-killing lesbians in *Taboo Parlor* are clichés. In this instance I reversed the porn cliché that, when you have two women and a man, the two women play with each other just to give the man pleasure. Instead the women use the man as their sex toy. Also I had the women naked in the very first scene and then dress up in the course of the movie. Remember in a porn flick, people are clothed in the very beginning and then sooner or later they get undressed and get to whatever kind of sex they are having. I did it exactly the other way around, and the producers were surprised. Though



"Taboo Parlor"

they had approved the screenplay, we never really discussed any details—and I think that's typical for Hollywood; we never sat down and argued with each other. And since you are powerless compared to the producers, you just have to put up with whatever decision they make. They reedited Lizzie's and my pieces for the American release. And they cut out the entire Brazilian piece at the end.

Why did they cut that one out?

Well, it started out to be quite an interesting script. I was very intrigued by it. It was based on a short story by Clarisse Lispector, about a teacher in her mid-30s who lives in the provinces of Brazil and embarks on a long train ride to Rio to catch a plane to the U.S. The motion of the train gets her into a state of sensual arousal. But then she is raped by two working-class men, really weird guys. In the original story it gets really ugly for her because the train conductor arrives and sees that she is half undressed with the two guys all over her. She gets arrested for indecent exposure and put into prison, where she's raped again. I found that quite interesting.

Ana Maria's was the only script I saw before I started to write mine. I thought there would have been a nice contrast: I would do the sadistic European woman compared to the masochistic South American woman who lives in a macho country. However, the producers were not happy with the first draft of Ana Maria's script. They thought it was not titillating enough. They forced her to rewrite the script to include a new character, a young man who rescues her from these two guys on the train. They fall in love, and in the end we have this romantic story which didn't work as well as her original concept.

Could you comment on how gay and lesbian audiences of your work have shifted over the last ten years.

You mean the changing of the Zeitgeist. A very important event that reveals the Zeitgeist is the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. They show about 200 films with either a gay or lesbian context or made by gay or lesbian film-makers. Ten years ago the taste was quite different: the audiences were expecting material they could immediately identify with; otherwise they easily got offended. I was there ten years ago when they showed a very interesting experimental film by a lesbian film-maker who intertwined clips from Japanese porn movies with straight porn material as well. I remember that half of the audience got mad. It was mostly San Francisco dykes, and they were so offended that they walked out screaming. Since I was just out in the lobby returning from the bathroom, they started attacking me. I just did the old thing, protecting the freedom of the artist and stressing the need for tolerance toward material that they might not be able to identify with. It has come a long way since then. The screen is no longer used as a shrink.

Both Virgin Machine *and* My Father Is Coming *are in a way coming-out stories focusing on the credibility of female roles.* Taboo Parlor *is really post-closet. Are your future films going to be post-closet as well? Have we left behind the time when coming out was an issue?*

I think my next film, *The Virility Factor*—if I can make it—is going to be queerer yet, with different sexual orientations, but not in a hierarchic way. There are more characters: transsexuals, straight people, lesbians, and gay men. And this is what I would love to portray: a world where there is no such thing as one group feeling superior to another. That's a kind of utopia, because I think people really like to identify or define themselves through their sexual preference, which I personally find invalid. Sometimes gay people overreact and say, "Our sexuality is heroic." I would like to be more relaxed about these issues and not use them to divide people. I think there are things far more important than dividing people according to their sexual orientation.

The Virility Factor *is based on Robert Merle's novel, which is pre-AIDS, about an epidemic killing all sexually potent men. Dr. Martinelli works as a scientist in a confine for "protected men" under the supervision of militia women to find a vaccine against the virus. Will your adaption be faithful to the novel?*

The script takes its inspiration from the novel but goes beyond it. The film takes place in the year 2034, preceding the novel's story by many years. America has split up into many different countries and is very poor. And we're looking at Northern California as a separate nation—it's the balkanization of America.

How about the main characters?

It is still Dr. Martinelli and his wife. However, he falls in love with a transsexual and his wife becomes a lesbian. The only people who die are straight men at the point of arousal. In the script, Hilda Helsingforth, the dominatrix, has become a cartoon character. She takes testosterone shots and is a tycoon who owns a pharmaceutical corporation. She produces her own testosterone and slowly gets caught in the prevalent straight men's disease.

Since you mentioned utopias: Is there a particular reason why you wanted to set The Virility Factor *in the future rather than in the present?*

I wanted to put *The Virility Factor* beyond AIDS, which I hope will be solved by 2034. Placing a current event into the future does give it more space.

Will you be making more documentaries?

For further down the road, I'm planning a film on a group of biological women who are beyond male and female. They are really like a third gender, because these women—they are all lesbians—take testosterone, but in smaller doses than transsexuals. They don't want to become men; they want to be able to go in both directions. Most of them can pass as men or boys. Females-to-males want to go all the way: their goal is to pass as men and to have surgery. This group of women doesn't want to have surgery. That's the interesting thing— they like to be shifting. Sometimes they appear to be male, sometimes they appear to be female, meanwhile they don't really care. I call them hyenas, because testosterone is something female hyenas have quite a bit of.

I'm currently working on a documentary about a former dominatrix and Mexican film actress who is trying to reorient her life. Eva used to be Mexico's Marilyn Monroe in the 1960s. Then she spoke out for abortion and women's rights and was kicked out of Mexico. She went to what then was still the Soviet Union and became a professional photographer. In the 80s she was New York's most famous dominatrix, and she still runs a dungeon in midtown. And she said to me, "Monika, I'm so tired of being a dominatrix. I just came back from India. I'm working every year now with Mother Teresa."

She sounds like a real world traveller.

By now, she speaks eight languages fluently: Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, French, Spanish, English, and Italian. She's learning Japanese and Arabic, and she's also taking courses in Swahili. She's a cultural chameleon—she can pretty much blend in anywhere. At the Beijing Women's Conference in 1996 she was sitting next to Hillary Clinton. Eva has a very strange "contact charisma," I like to call it, which she uses in the most unexpected circumstances. She's a true citizen of the underworld.

Where have you been shooting?

We've traveled with her to Mexico City, where her mother lives; and to New York, where she lives in a hotel room with a young black man whom she found

Eva (left) in *Didn't Do It for Love*

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through an ad in the paper asking for companionship. Then we shot in Trondheim in Norway, where she was born and where her father, a Russian prince who wants to be an ordinary Norwegian citizen, collects bottles from garbage cans. Originally, we even planned to shoot Eva in the Calcutta hospital where she works with Mother Teresa, but that never materialized.

Will you emphasize her life as a dominatrix?

The dominatrix phase is one aspect of the total Eva, and it will only be 20 percent of the documentary. I'm interested in the banality of perversion. Being a dominatrix is not so different from being a cleaning woman. She gets rid of the dust bunnies in the corners of our psyches.

Can you explain that a little bit more—the banality of S/M?

Well, it's a business like any other business. It's a service not unlike catering for a party. Eva has dominatrixes working for her whose other identities are housewives in New Jersey, tennis players, lawyers, students, actors, and psychiatrists.

Don't you feel that you might be portraying her in a way that she'd not agree with?

Eva agrees with the portrait I'm painting of her. Any portrait is an intrusion. However, I'm trying to show Eva in all her many aspects without judgment. The only judgment is the organic structure of the film. It's up to the audience to decide.

What will the film be called?

The title will be *Didn't Do It for Love.*

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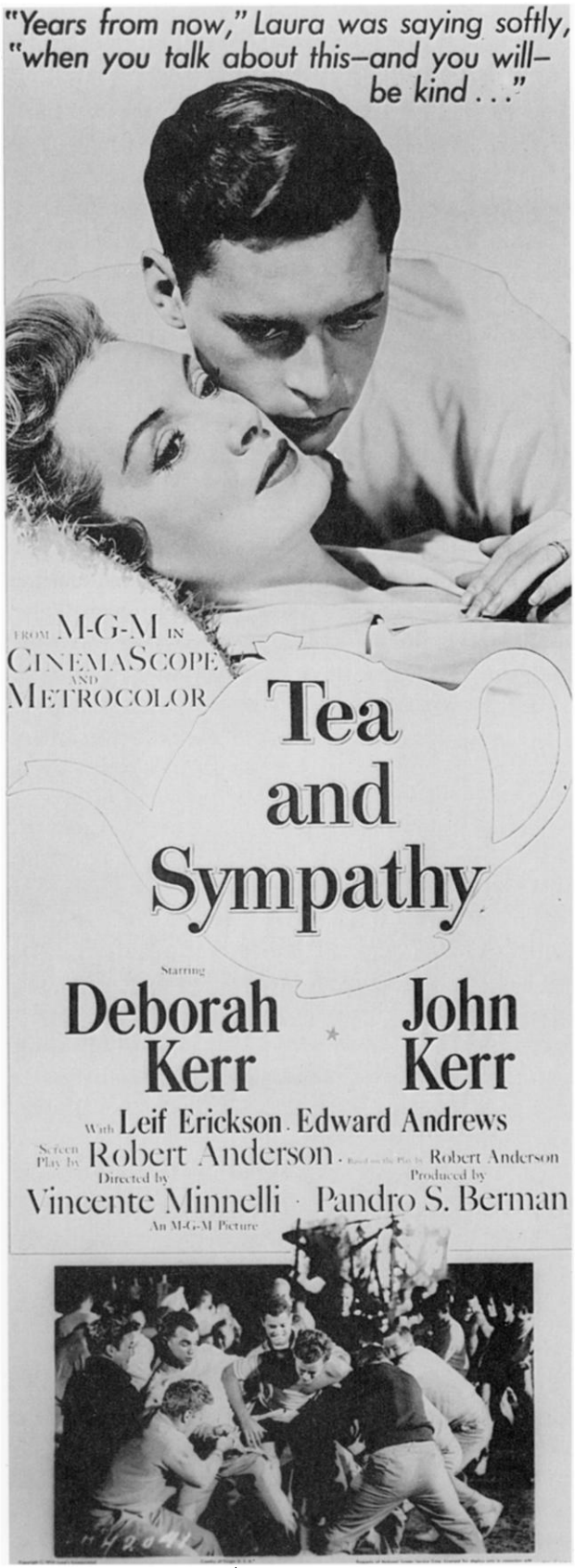
My Father Is Coming is available from Tara Releasing, in San Rafael, Calif.; all other films are available from First Run Features, in New York City.



David Gerstner

The Production and Display of the Closet

Making Minnelli's *Tea and Sympathy*

To make Robert Anderson's play *Tea and Sympathy* into a film,[1] MGM had to convince the Motion Picture Association of America (M.P.A.A.), the Production Code Administration (P.C.A.), and even the Catholic Legion of Decency that the film would clearly punish the sexual transgression of the married woman, and that it would not overtly or covertly make any reference to homosexuality. In effect, the centerpieces of the play had to be removed. No matter how MGM attempted to rewrite the narrative to satisfy the Code, *Tea and Sympathy* would either be the play it was on Broadway or it would be morally objectionable. In his memo summarizing the making of the film, Geoffrey Shurlock (Joseph Breen's successor as the director of the P.C.A.) pointed out to M.P.A.A. President Eric Johnston that "Any proposed treatment removing these two unacceptable basic elements of the play would make it necessary to write an entirely new story and hence would seem to make pointless the purchase of the particular play."[2]

Tea and Sympathy had already caused quite a stir when it opened on Broadway in September, 1953. Aside from the publicity surrounding Deborah Kerr's first New York stage performance, *Tea and Sympathy* shot right for the heterosexual male jugular. The play challenged not only the social doxology surrounding masculinity, but, worse, it waved the threat of latent homosexuality in the very faces of those whose insecurity matched the hypermasculine figures in the drama. As one reviewer put it after seeing the film: "It may make more than one adult male squirm in his seat with unhappy memories of youth."[3] Situated within the context of 1950s America, *Tea and Sympathy* was risky business. Risky, but successful. Major studios and independents (MGM, Paramount, Warner, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Samuel Goldwyn) vied for its film rights.

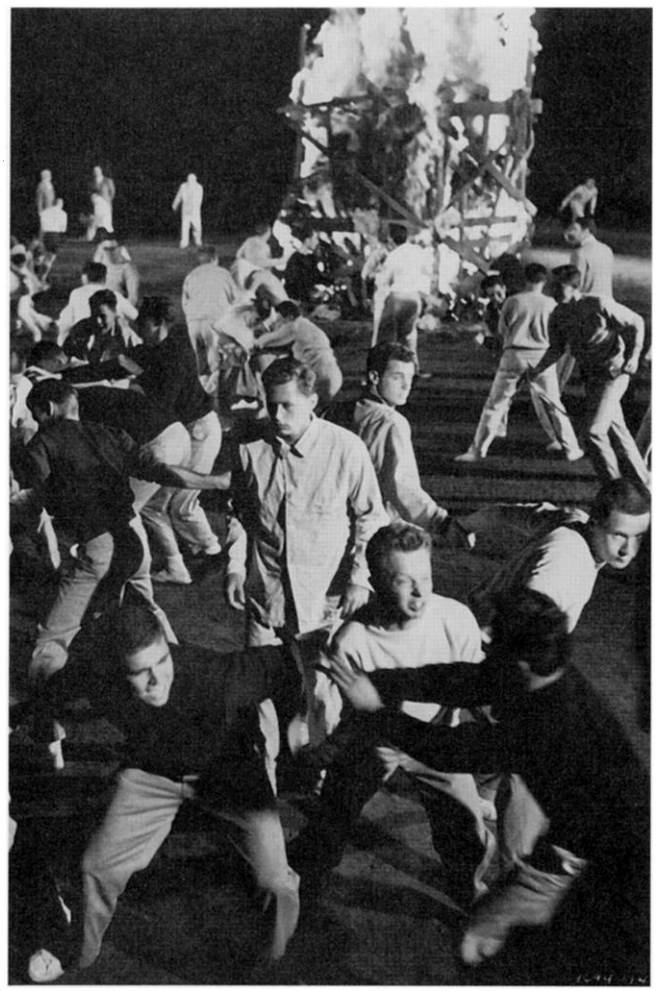
According to letters and memos found in the Production Code's files for MGM, each studio's difficulty in making this film circulated around the utterance (implied or otherwise) of homosexuality. In fact, both points of Code contestation (homosexuality and the woman's sexual transgression) were imbricated with homophobia and fear of the effeminization of masculinity. Through a series of public and private discourses (which are founded upon and within a historical relationship of urban male middle-class anxiety about gender and political effeminization), the making of *Tea and Sympathy* at MGM points to what Eve Sedgwick terms the "spectacle of the homosexual closet." Not only is the film a marker of the spectacle of the closet, but the spectacle of the closet is generated, displayed, and reinforced precisely through the discourses of the making of the text and, more precisely, through the making of the film's structured silence.

Caught in the confines of 1950s production regulations, Vincente Minnelli was put on the job to make a film that abided by these constraints. Yet his aestheticization of the text—his color-coding of the text—effectively works within and *against* the enforced proscriptions of the P.C.A. and the Legion of Decency. Minnelli's use of an aestheticized mise-en-scène makes it possible to realize the anxiety-ridden intersections that exist between the discursive practices surrounding the making of the film (what to do about the homosexual and the transgressive woman) and the social conditions in which those discursive practices were situated (in what ways do the homosexual and the transgressive women threaten American masculinity?). *Tea and Sympathy* marked the site of contestation not only in the multiple changes Hollywood faced in the 1950s, but also in the wrenching changes in political gender relations in America, in which both the MGM producers and Minnelli participated.

Tea and Sympathy tells the story of Tom, a young boy at Chilton Prep School in New England. He lives in the home of the school coach, Bill Reynolds, and his wife, Laura. Laura's role is well established by her marriage to Bill—her emotional involvement with the boys is limited to serving them "tea and sympathy." All the other boys who live with them are involved in school athletics, reflecting what Bill considers a family tradition at Chilton, especially in his household. The young scions that dwell there are young robust men—the regular guys. Tom, on the other hand, prefers Bach and folk songs to volleyball and football. In both the play and the film, Tom is the threatening agent of Bill's masculinity. He is not just a young boy who becomes infatuated with Bill's wife, but a male figure who threatens Bill's image of masculinity. The play and the film, however, rehearse two different versions of what this threat implies.

In the play, Tom, because of his "long-haired" proclivities, is accused of being "queer." His homosexuality is confirmed when he is reportedly seen nude on the beach with a "known" homosexual teacher from the school. In the film, he is caught by two of the school's volleyball players in a sewing circle on the beach with the faculty wives. His being caught in a "feminine" activity gains him the nickname Sister Boy, and he becomes the target of rumor and blacklisting. In fact, he is considered so far outside the parameters of the regular guys that, during the bonfire rites-of-passage scene, when the other young initiates are humiliated by having their pyjamas torn off, Tom is ignored, and is thus humiliated because he is *not properly* humiliated.

Both the play and the film are about the developing relationship between Laura and Tom, which leads to a sexual liaison. In Laura he finds the one person who empathizes with him. She marks the tripartite space of mother, confidant, and lover for Tom. The oft-quoted final line ("Years from now . . . when you talk about this . . . and you will . . . be kind") will, however, carry two different conclusions. The play's ending on this note does not necessarily recommend an absolute or final (heterosexual) desire. Rather, the play potentially lends itself to the idea of choosing one's own sexual object (i.e., Tom may be with Laura at this point, but we are given no indication of what his



Tom (John Kerr) ignored by the "regular guys" of *Tea and Sympathy*

future choices might be).[4] The film, however, through the addition of a prologue and epilogue (the framing story), will in fact turn out to be a fait accompli of heterosexual standards and regulations.

The prologue sets the body of the narrative in a flashback. Tom has returned to Chilton for a ten-year reunion, and he recalls meeting Laura and the events that followed. The epilogue immediately follows the famous final scene by introducing a letter from Laura to Tom in which she tells him that what they did was wrong and that she has realized the error of their ways. She must leave Chilton for some undisclosed place where she will never be seen or heard from again. In effect, Laura defends the production of the closet by letting Tom know that his quest and struggle for manhood, while inappropriate in the way they handled it, is good as long as he ends up married and is able to repent for the wrong they committed. Tom gets away with marriage and Laura serves time in the eternal void.

While Vito Russo is right that the "visibility [of gays] has never really been an issue in the movie," he omits the historical discourse of production of the very closet he discusses in his book. His suggestion that the film version of *Tea and Sympathy* "mutes" the homosexual text of the play is useful, however, in terms of a historical analysis.[5] Russo's contention that "*at no time* was consideration given to making the homosexuality in *Tea and Sympathy* more explicit"[6] elides the underpinnings of a discourse of production that actually *did* consider the possibility of including the homosexual in the film. Homosexuality is "muted" in the film insofar as that "muting" is produced through a hyperbolic cacophony of silencing that homosexuality.

The making of *Tea and Sympathy* is precisely one of the places where the Hollywood institution reveals itself making the closet. Eve Sedgwick sees the "spec-

Tom and Laura (Deborah Kerr)

The Museum of Modern Art—Film Stills Archive

tacle of the homosexual closet" as the "open secret." "Closetedness [is] itself," she suggests, "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it."[7]

It is in the making of the film that the reinforcement of the "normative," or compulsory heterosexuality, is maintained. The normative supports and sees itself through its own mythic binarisms (male/female, sex/violence, normative/nonnormative, homosocial/homosexual). This is to say that particular relationships are sanctioned within the normative. Outside the heterosexual marriage contract there lie relationships between men and between women—the homosocial—which purportedly do not participate in sexual relations. The homosocial works coterminously with the normative order's binary structures to the extent that the normative guards the homosocial against both sexuality and violence. But it is the homosocial that guards the normative binaries by defending them against degrees of difference. Variation from the established order motivates suspicion on the part of these assigned guardians. The degree of difference is decidedly valuable to the well-being of the normative because the normative maintains its mythic binaries by exposing what is outside the social order. The degree of difference is located in the homosocial through the marked outsider.[8]

The play's contextual relationship to McCarthyism is most obvious. The public postwar discourse (articulated through the speech act of smearing) facilely determined personal character by appearance and gesture. It underscored the almost maniacal fear of loss of control on the side of the Law. *Tea and Sympathy* flagged the insidiousness and the ease with which these witch-hunt campaigns could proceed. Laura, at one point, reminds Tom's roommate, Al (as well as the audience), "how easy it is to smear a person."[9]

The entanglement of moral discourses of sexuality and gender relations in America came under great stress between 1920 and 1950. Middle-class values were moving toward a more liberal stance, but conservative organizations also sprang up in response to this liberal swing. In the 1950s, *Tea and Sympathy* found itself relegated to the list of literature condemned by the National Organization for Decent Literature (alongside *From Here to Eternity*, *The Well of Loneliness*, and *Catcher in the Rye*). During this time, the Legion of Decency already had a stranglehold on Hollywood film censorship. Focused on F.D.R.'s New Deal and leftist policies, the Republicans denounced Communism in the late 1940s with accusations of "red" infiltration in government positions. But red is not the only color of anxiety.

John Boswell notes that, as early as A.D. 1215, markers of identification were utilized to locate "degrees of difference," particularly those which could not necessarily be seen. One of the rulings of the Fourth Lateran Council "ordered [Jews] to wear clothing which [would distinguish] them from Christians."[10] Boswell goes on to say that where identification of difference in homogenous areas was difficult, the wearing of the "Jewish badge" was enforced. Centuries later, the Nazis would demand the placement of an identification "badge" (Jew, gypsy, criminal, homosexual, etc.) on concentration camp prisoners in order to determine the marked prisoner's treatment and/or punishment.

It is precisely the assigning of these markers throughout history (often color-coded and forced upon the body) that allowed for the easy identification of those who "needed" to be seen. During the McCarthy era, locating and marking the homosexual was necessary in order to prevent the "effeminization" of the American male. The film *Tea and Sympathy*, through Minnelli's aestheticized coloring, brings to the surface the frenetic attempt to stamp and define an identity with a predetermined color.

In the late 1930s a debate took place between the Catholic traditionalist G. K. Chesterton and the aesthete journalist Robert Lynd over the meaning behind the wearing of the color pink. Chesterton noted "the current tendency to express party politics by means of Shirts,"[11] and added that pink was "the essentially false and negative colour because it is the dilution of something that is rich and glowing or nothing."[12] This "anaem[ic]" color is a wobbly middle-of-the-road color, especially in political matters. "There is," Chesterton continued, "a merely pink humanitarianism which I dislike even more than the *real* Red Communism."[13]

Lynd refutes Chesterton in his essay "In Defence of Pink." Lynd reminds his reader that pink is chosen in most English-speaking societies as the "symbol of perfection,"[14] particularly as it is linked with high society or the leisure class. For Lynd this class position finds itself in relationship to "pink humanitarianism": "I have never blinded myself to the fact that in politics I am a wobbling sentimentalist! I have said to myself, 'If only everybody were as pink as I, all this nonsense

in the world would end in a week. If only everybody wobbled like me, how well everybody would get on together.'"[15]

We recognize pink as the feminine marker of gender from birth, and such markers of identification come under careful scrutiny in a masculinist society. A careless positioning of a feminine code onto/into a masculine marker could spell the difference for the well-being of one's manly virtue. And as both Alan Sinfield and George Chauncey reveal in their historical accounts of urban middle-class masculinity in turn-of-the-century England and America (respectively), the fear of women or the potential threat of feminizing men posed a serious reconsideration of male (self) representation of virility.[16]

Sinfield points out that, historically, "effeminate" behavior has been accepted in circles of the English leisure class and intellectuals. Before his trial in 1895, Oscar Wilde's behavior was not necessarily seen as deviant or morally objectionable. As Sinfield shows, however, the upshot of Wilde's trial for sodomy was that the effeminate male would no longer merely be judged as an effete figure of an intellectual or leisure class. He would now be identified as the homosexual. While "[e]ffeminacy preceded the category of homosexual . . . " it would now "[overlap] with and [influence] the period of its development."[17]

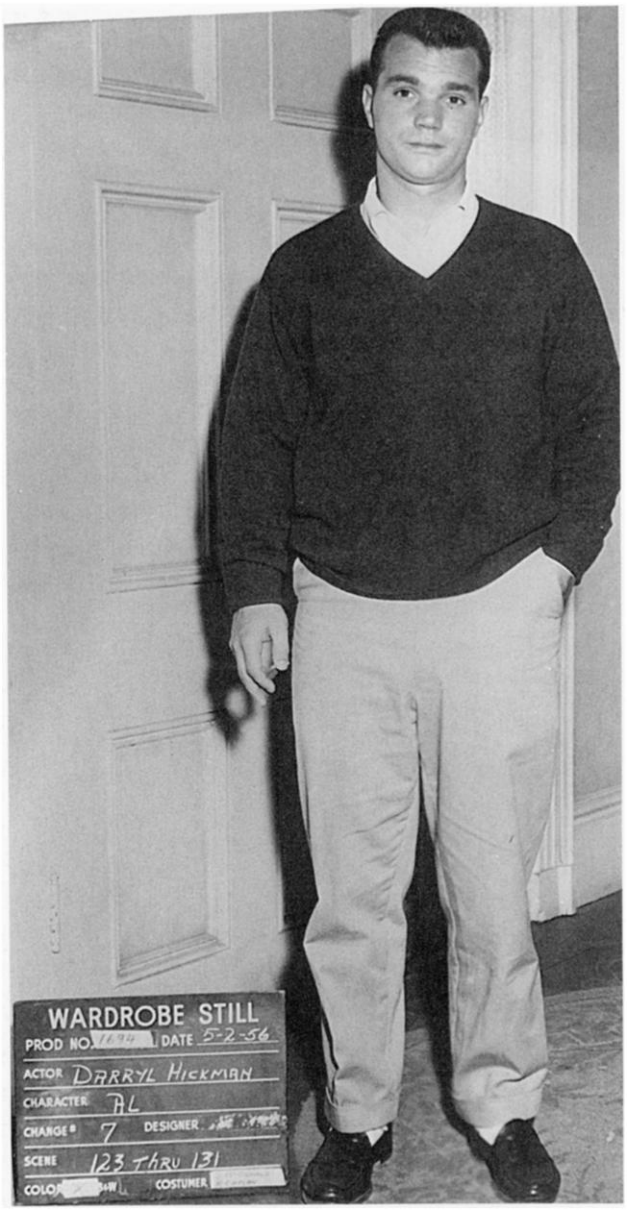
In urban centers of America at the turn of the century, as Chauncey shows in *Gay New York*, the male middle class witnessed women entering the new industrial work force, women teaching the boys of America in schools, and (distressingly) the presence of the "invert" in public spaces. (The invert was the male figure who had a "female soul," dressed in women's clothes, wore makeup, and most often took a woman's name.) These inescapable social factors aroused an anxiety over the very "manhood" of the male heterosexual. In the era of Theodore Roosevelt, defining American manhood became the major order of business. Men consumed themselves with "muscularity, rough sports, prizefighting, and hunting as an antidote to the overcivilization of American men, . . . the cause was taken up in newspapers, boys' clubs, and backyard lots throughout the nation."[18] All the physical rigor and construction of the homosocial was in response to this perceived effeminization of the American male. Of course, the scapegoat for this rising homosocial would be the invert, who marked what the American male must not become in terms of behavior and self-representation. The turn of the century's attempt to eliminate softness, effeminization, and overcivilization from America's cultural habits would move into high gear under the auspices of the McCarthy and Eisenhower era. The cataloguing of social markers by gender played an important role in the way post-World War II America would construct its political parameters. *Tea and Sympathy* highlights this delicately balanced, stridently defensive version of 1950s male anxiety.

What becomes apparent in this evolvement of male anxiety during the first half of the 20th century, where it intersects with politics and gender identification, is that American culture and politics were viewed by a male middle class as being threatened by women and the homosexual—both of whom, ironically, must necessarily maintain the normative condition for the homosocial precisely through their difference. To compound this half century of male-identified anxiety, the once easily identified invert became more difficult to see. He was more difficult to see because many men who exercised any sort of homosexual desire were fearful of being read as effeminate (and thereby read as homosexual) and so acted like "regular guys."

The publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 further fueled the anxiety of that which could not be seen. Kinsey's report informed the American public of the ubiquity of homosexual activity. Its most striking and threatening aspect, however, was that, as John D'Emilio summarizes, "homosexuals came from all walks of life, and . . . did not conform in appearance or mannerism to the popular stereotype."[19] Both the homosexual and the Communist were viewed as domestic and international security risks as well. On the home front, the homosexual (or the "sexual pervert") threatened not only American youth but governmental agencies.

According to a U.S. Senate report in 1950 by the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments, the influx of merely "one sex pervert [sic] in a Government agency tends to have a corrosive influence upon his fellow employees. . . . One homosexual can pollute a Government office."[20] More terrifying, however, was the danger of blackmail for the homosexual. American secrets were in peril, ironically, because of the homosexual's fear of being discovered. It is noteworthy that in April, 1953, shortly before the Broadway opening of *Tea and Sympathy*, Eisenhower issued "an executive order barring gay men and lesbians from all federal jobs."[21]

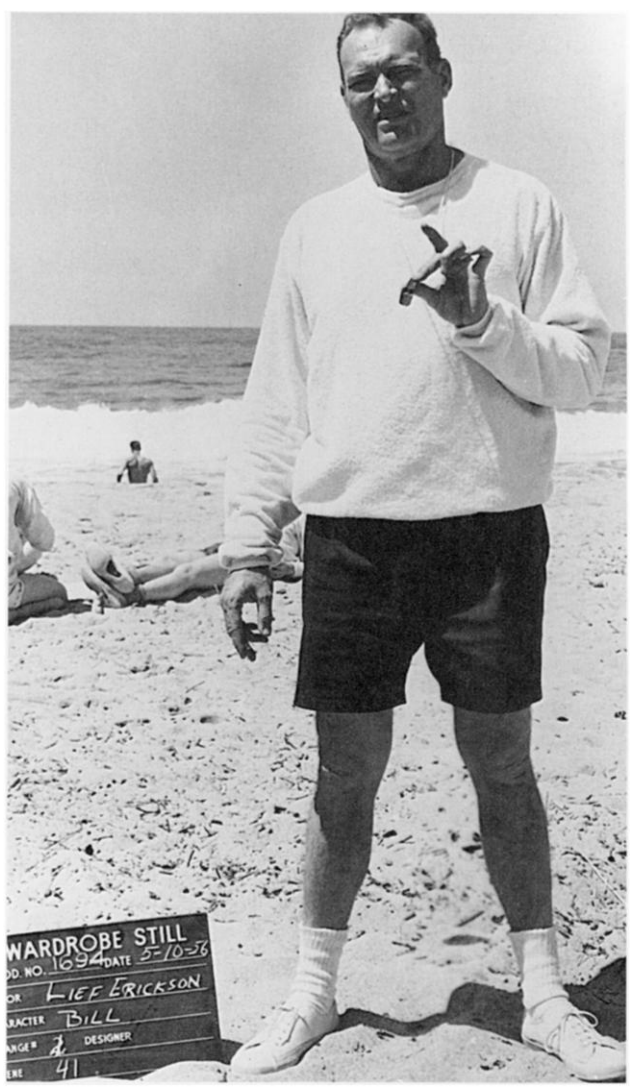
The invisible Communist and the equally invisible homosexual were frequently conflated in political discourse. Arthur Schlesinger described Communism as "something secret, sweaty and furtive, like nothing



so much, in the phrase of one wise observer of modern Russia, as homosexuals in a boy's school."[22] Republican Senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska could not put this anxiety more succinctly: "I don't say every homosexual is a subversive, and I don't say every subversive is a homosexual. But a man of low morality is a menace in the government, whatever he is, and they are tied up together."[23]

A color is assigned to the homosexual, like the Communist, in order to talk about this sexual/juridical anxiety which threatened to seep into sacrosanct American politics. Pink and red in 1950s America marked the invisible space of fear that urgently needed to be made visible. Robert Anderson's *Tea and Sympathy* and its making into a film are seated directly at the intersection of discourse where the American masculine subject found himself nervously guarding every performance he made on a day-to-day basis. Those making the film were extremely sensitive to these current affairs of state.

In October, 1953, when the major studios jumped to purchase *Tea and Sympathy* film rights, Anderson refused to sell to Samuel Goldwyn unless the company retained a "*sine qua non* that the leading lady solve the boy's problem by giving herself to him sexually" and, further, that the film "kept the boy's problem [as springing] from the *malicious* charge of homosexuality . . . homosexuality was not to be



Wardrobe stills: for Al (Darryl Hickman, opposite page, left); Bill (Leif Erickson); opposite page, right, and Tom (right)

Wardrobe stills courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

glossed over."[24] In fact, the main reason for the P.C.A.'s continuous rejection of a possible screenplay was the consistent usage of the word homosexual or its implications. After confronting the zealous denouncements by the P.C.A. and the Legion of Decency, MGM's strategy was to erase any and all references—explicit or implicit—to homosexuality from the screenplay. With other studios competing for the scripts, Dore Schary (Vice President in Charge of Production at MGM) announced that the character of the boy would not point to the "question of homosexuality" but rather would "center the boy's problem on the fact that he was an 'off horse.'"[25] Schary, echoing a popular and comforting sentiment of 1950s America, saw the boy's "problem" as one of "cowardice and lack of manliness." He later recalls how dumbfounded he was when the Legion insisted on the woman's punishment simply because she had "given the young student a *healthy* sex experience."[26] Schary's relationship to this film highlights the liberal attitude that straddled the extreme right and left positions of both contemporary gender relations and politics in Hollywood. His stance, and it was often an unpopular one, would distress the studio bosses at MGM, not only with this film, but with many of the projects on which he worked.

Schary pushed hard for the making of such films as *Crossfire* (1947), *Battleground* (1949), and *Tea and Sympathy*. Films like *Crossfire* were hard sells, and Schary often put himself on the line for them. Of course, *Crossfire* was based on a novel, *The Brick Foxhole*, in which homosexuality was central to its plot. Schary, in part because of the Production Code, changed the homosexual to a Jew. As with *Tea and Sympathy*, the homosexual was erased.

Tea and Sympathy (like *Crossfire*) was important for Schary not because of homosexuality, but because of the speech act of smearing. Schary based his moral agenda on his ability to work with others because they were good workers, not because of their political affiliations—or their homosexuality. His middle-of-

the-road liberalism maintained the homosexual as a figure of pity and invisibility. This stance would invariably inform MGM's final version of *Tea and Sympathy*.

With the bidding war in high gear for the film rights of *Tea and Sympathy*, MGM "raised the ante to the then astonishing sum of $400,000, of which $300,000 would be withheld until Anderson turned in a filmable script."[27] This filmable script would include a prologue and an epilogue that would punish the wife's wrongs. This script would also translate the question of homosexuality into a conflict of defining masculinity.

Between January and August, 1955, a series of screenplay rewrites was undertaken by Anderson and MGM. To convey to Shurlock his frustration with the archaic structure of the Code and the continuous intervention of the Legion of Decency, Schary sent him a letter (dated 16 May, 1955) with a copy of an article in *Look* entitled "How Much Do We Know About Men?"[28] The article was flanked by a full-page vertical photograph of a small boy looking up to the statue of David (whose genitalia are covered by a fig leaf). It was written by Lawrence K. Frank, who was, according to *Look*'s biographical account of the author, the "former chairman of the International Preparatory Commission for the International Congress on Mental Health." The essay attempts to underscore changing gender relations in America in terms of society's constituted system of values; it briefly mentions homosexuality, but mainly focuses the question on what it means to be a "real man" (i.e., "modern" man, who could now share "in baby and child care, in cooking, dishwashing, housekeeping") without threatening the definitions of male and female.[29] Schary's basic contention was that if this masculinity question could be discussed in a major national magazine, ought it not be brought to the screen? Schary (and so MGM), of course, won the debate.

On 1 September, 1955, Shurlock informed Schary that Anderson's revisions "now meet the requirements of the Production Code." The moral heat, however, was far from turned off. On 25 September, 1955, the *New York Times* ran an article, "MGM Solves Its *Tea and Sympathy* Script Problem," in which writer Tom Pryor interviewed MGM unit producer Pandro S. Berman. Albeit skewed to shift the emphasis away from homosexuality and toward the conflict of defining masculinity, the article conveys the certainty that the audience will recognize what the script is really about. Berman states:

> The theme of the play is essentially this: what is manliness? We haven't changed that at all. The boy is regarded by fellow students and the housemaster as an "off-horse" because he doesn't flex his muscles and knock himself out climbing mountains or playing basketball. To them he is soft physically and becomes suspect. They conveniently pigeon-hole their standards for manliness and anyone who doesn't conform is an oddball. *We never say in the film that the boy has homosexual tendencies—I don't believe the word homosexual was actually spoken in the play either—but any adult who has ever heard of the word and understands its meaning will clearly understand this suspicion in the film.*[30]

For the MGM producers, smearing, or the malicious scapegoating of those with a degree of difference, was what the film was about. By this point in the making of the film, the homosexual who could not be seen because of his ability to elide interpretation would now render himself on the screen and become recognizable while remaining unseen. Berman announced this invisible presence by marking his invisibility.

The *New York Times* article threw the Legion into a tailspin. How could this notion of "suspicion" still remain at this point in the production? They still, however, carried the hammer and nails for keeping the closet shut. Fearful of losing moral control over the film industry, the Very Reverend Monsignor Thomas F. Little wrote to Shurlock on 27 September, 1955, expressing his wish "respectively, to advise you of our impression of the proposed story changes." From published reports that the reverend had seen, there merely seemed "an effort . . . to color and mask the essential offensiveness of the questionable material . . . hence [there is] no elkmination [sic] of the grounds for serious moral objection."

Shurlock's response to the reverend was to tell him of his surprise at these published reports and of his intention to bring them immediately to the attention of Berman and Schary. But his gesture was only one of perfunctory politeness. By this time the film had been approved by the P.C.A. Shurlock, however, offered the Legion the opportunity to write their own version of the epilogue. Their rewrite points to the discursive

weight of the Legion's attempt to control social meaning.

The Legion's corrections to the epilogue reflect their need for a transparently clear reading of Laura's transgressions and her punishments. Their rewrite left no question, either, about Tom's satisfactory transition from suffering young man to well-adjusted married heterosexual.

> Anderson: These are terrible things to write you, Tom, about guilt and right and wrong. But you are old enough to know that when you drop a pebble in the water there are ever widening circles of ripples. There are always consequences.
>
> Legion: These are terrible things to write you, Tom, about sin and guilt. But you are old enough to know that when you drop a pebble in the water there are ripples that may carry afar a burden of good or of evil.
>
> And, from Anderson: Dear Tom, have a good life, a full life, an understanding life.
>
> The Legion, however, sought to emphasise this portion of the letter with: Dear Tom, I was so pleased to hear that you were married.

While Anderson's version survives over the Legion's more egregious (yet banal) reworking, it still needed to fall between the Legion's moral condemnation and the P.C.A.'s enforced use of the unseen but ubiquitous homosexual who acted as the marker of difference and necessarily reinforced Tom's heterosexual union. The framing story of *Tea and Sympathy* is clearly the container of the closet.

After two years of debate, *Tea and Sympathy* would begin production. Just before the film's release, Dore Schary sent a letter to Arthur Loew deriding MGM's handling of *Tea and Sympathy*. "We abandoned a principle," he wrote, "alienated a good and valuable writer [and] . . . hurt a valuable picture." His letter points to the instability and unreliability of the moral and political ground on which Hollywood finds itself when confronted with a socially taboo subject. Schary was frustrated with "the two or three people sitting in a room [who] insisted on words that are trite and self-righteous." Even though MGM had a "good battleground on which to wage a fight . . . we have retreated and run away."[31] According to Schary, two months after he sent this letter to Loew, and one month after *Tea and Sympathy* was released, Loew handed him a letter from an anonymous "loyal studio employee" which listed an array of charges, including accusations that Schary had had sex with MGM "glamourous female stars" and that he had "encouraged male stars to lose to [him] in gin games in exchange for assigning them juicy roles."[32] Schary was out of a job. While *Tea and Sympathy* was not the deciding factor in his firing, it certainly played a pivotal role in the tense dynamics between Schary and MGM executives.

Aestheticizing the Text

Reading the autobiographies of Dore Schary and Vincente Minnelli, one is struck by what can best be described as the cordial relationship between them. Schary mentions Minnelli as director, and Minnelli recalls Schary as the outsider who would be friendly enough to send him a kind letter when he was embarking on a new project. Schary handled the front line of production and Minnelli made sure that the product was delivered, but to see this relationship as merely one of a labor/management situation is to dismiss the ways in which they overrode the "battleground" (to use Schary's terminology) that existed because of the Code and the studio system. They both showed a certain determination, albeit directed in different ways, that challenged the constraints under which they often had to work. While Schary negotiated the politics of the studio system, Minnelli constructed a film that would hyperbolize and aestheticize the anxiety of American men over the possible effeminization of their own masculinity.

There were particular arenas during the 1940s and 50s where the display of the male body as homoerotic was circulated. Films such as Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), the male erotica films from Apollo and Zenith studios, and the paintings of Paul Cadmus point to this representation of homosexual male desire. To declare Minnelli's hyperbolization of the male body—consider Gene Kelly in *The Pirate* and *An American in Paris,* or the young studs in *Tea and Sympathy*—as the site of such desire is potentially (and probably) valid; the homosexual, however, is not necessarily *identifiable* as such. While Pandro Berman earlier articulated the homosexual into vis-

ibility, we still do not see a homosexual. Tom, identified as creative and gentle (rehearsing his "feminine traits"), is *not* a homosexual. We can, however, see masculine anxiety and its attendant homophobia.

It is the masculinized figure who is caught in Minnelli's aesthetically frenetic mise-en-scène.[33] Minnelli's melodrama explores an aesthetic mise-en-scène that visually heightens the cultural anxiety of masculinity in postwar America. Traditionally, melodrama has been regarded as the genre of anxiety constructed through a symptomatic mise-en-scène (heightened gesture, color, etc.) as a way of revealing the repressed middle-class angst of sexual desire (usually the woman's). But to recommend the genre as only a symptomatic rendering of the repressed is to foreclose an analysis that looks to discover the ways in which those symptoms are actually produced and represented. Following the tradition of the historical aesthete (Huysmans, Firbank, Van Vechten, etc.), Minnelli practices a process of aestheticization on the mise-en-scène in order to make visible and hyperbolize the cultural anxiety of masculinity. Indeed, melodrama and its tradition of a "melodramatic imagination" are historically constituted as a practice of heightened representation.

While Minnelli's films need to be examined individually, one can argue that they visually render the hyperactivity of men's anxiety toward the production of their own masculinity. In *Tea and Sympathy*, the hypermasculinity of the homosocial does not necessarily deliver a representation of homosexual desire, but actually works to represent American homophobia of the 1950s. In effect, homosexual desire is not met not only because of its (en)forced silence, but also because of the indetermination of exactly what that homosexual desire is. What can be displayed, however, is the aggressivity of the masculine figure within the homosocial grouping.[34] The anxiety of homosocial desire between men on the screen—homophobia—becomes that which can be seen. It is, in other words, not so much a question of locating homosexual desire as it is a question of illustrating homosexual panic.[35] In much of Minnelli's work he constructs a text whereby these desexed and hypermasculinized figures are pressed within and against the service of an aestheticized mise-en-scène that collapses any supposed verisimilitude surrounding the social order of masculinity, as well as pushing to the surface the entrenched homophobia of that social order. Even though Minnelli could not escape the shackles of the framing story demanded for *Tea and Sympathy*, he did direct a film that elides the proscription by aestheticizing the mise-en-scène, or the place in which these men cinematically reside.

Minnelli himself continually experienced an ongoing conflict about masculinity. The use of terms such as "shy" to define himself defy a seemingly more potent personal query. "I was never told that creativity was unmanly," Minnelli recounts,

> Looking at Mr. Frazier's [Minnelli's first boss at Marshall Field's where he did window displays in the early 20s] assistant, a William Bendix type, and talking to the other display men who were all married and raising families, I saw by their example that one could function as the male animal and still give vent to his so-called feminine traits. As a result, I wasn't cowed at this impressionable age into more conventionally male avenues of expression. I am thankful for that. I'd make a miserable football coach.[36]

Minnelli's effete demeanor would clearly put him in constant conflict with the anxiety of "what it means to be a man" in 1950s America. Minnelli's placement of the male bodies in *Tea and Sympathy* against his aestheticized mise-en-scène reveal

> the hystericised body [offering] a key emblem of that convergence [psychic and corporeal], since it is a body pre-eminently invested with meaning, a body become the place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and cannot be articulated verbally.[37]

For Minnelli, it is precisely the emplacement of the male body *within and against* his aestheticized mise-en-scène that makes speak, and indeed makes visible, the mechanisms of the text's produced silence and invisibility (the P.C.A., the Legion, McCarthy, et al.).

For example, Al is introduced in the film as Tom's sympathetic friend and roommate. When the "sister boy" scenario begins, Al's father demands that he move out of his room with Tom the following school term. When Al has to break the news to Tom, Minnelli places the two boys in the school music room where Tom often escapes to listen to Bach. It is a large room with high ceilings filled with musical instruments, musical scores, and composer busts. There is a way in which the room calls to mind a trompe-l'oeil. It is

against this obviously aestheticized mise-en-scène that the social demands of masculinity will be painfully exposed.

Al's decision to inform Tom of his patriarchal order (as it were) is bracketed by the two boys' pathetic attempt to help each other understand the socially constructed turmoil in which they are forced to live. Tom asks his friend to show him what it is that he does "wrong." He wants to know how he can be more "manly." Al offers to show Tom how to walk—"like a man." This masculine strut is parodied until it collapses under the strain of its own laborious construction, to be finally revealed as a socially constructed joke. It is at this moment in the film that masculine anxiety, confronted with its own ridiculous construction, can no longer support itself. Al, pressed within and against the mise-en-scène of the Minnellian text and finally caught in the vestiges of masculinity, can't understand why walking a particular way is more manly than any other.

But it is color, as is often the case with Minnelli, that will motivate the intricate possibility of reading this text beyond the surface narrative and will prove to be the activating agent for revealing the dialogic relationships between *Tea and Sympathy* and the historical world. It is apposite that just as color is used in the social and historical spheres to mark what is seemingly ubiquitous but unlocatable, it is used by Minnelli to confuse the rules—he places color in the film in order to reveal the production of this silenced meaning.

If color is used on the contemporary political scene to locate the unlocatable by McCarthy and friends, Minnelli would make certain that this peculiar hyperactivity to color code would be ironically and hyperbolically rendered on the screen. In 1962, Minnelli states that the "film-maker must have a point of view toward his subject." This point of view will determine the way in which the film-maker will construct the subject from which he or she is working: "In each case all [the film-maker's] decisions which determine style are, in turn, determined by your subject. You cannot impose this style. It must come *from* the subject."[38] Making the film must be considered a "situation as real life."

Minnelli's meticulous attention to the proper selection and utilization of color within the text works in direct relation with not simply his individualized worldview, but also his complex relationships within the world. In order to develop a sense of color one must "[learn] to see color. We are all surrounded by color if we will only learn to notice it."

The play, *Tea and Sympathy*, presses two colors into the service of its mise-en-scène. While Anderson assigns these colors to characters' "essence," Minnelli engulfs the char-

Walk like a man:
Tom (left) and Al

acters in these color assignations, at once immersing and suffocating them within the gendered roles they are culturally forced to play. Yellow is marked as Laura's color; it indirectly suggests Laura's "essence [as] gentleness."[39] In the film Laura is framed by yellow curtains in her kitchen; at other times she will be sitting in her yellow chair in her living room or surrounded by her yellow kitchen bowls.

Anderson marks blue as the color for men who are desperately clinging to their boyhood, unable to manage the cultural conditions of manhood. He puts Tom in a blue suit before his date with Ellie (the "town whore"), where he states, "Put me in a blue suit and I look like a kid."[40] Tom will wear blue pajamas, pants, and shirts throughout the film.

Minnelli, however, disperses these colors throughout the text so that they blend into variant hues in order to associate the character's psychological and emotional states. He weaves the yellow and blue motifs through the narrative in order to formulate intratextual references to the internal psychology of the characters. In the beginning of the film, for example, we see Laura in her garden while we hear Tom sing a love ballad from his bedroom window. As they convene in the garden, Tom comments on her "green thumb" (green, of course, being the admixture of yellow and blue), at which point she realizes with surprise that this stunning fecundity only blossomed after her arrival at Chilton.

Green also symbolizes blue's need for yellow and yellow's need for blue. This sought-after balance of blue and yellow represents, in the film, the "necessary" link between the socially constructed gender extremes. The missing blue in Laura's life is foregrounded in Laura and Bill's inadequate sex life. Laura, when she first encounters Tom in her garden, comments that her garden needs more blue. Tom, however, will compensate for Laura's lack of blue by giving her a package of blue forget-me-not flower seeds, which he places on the dashboard of her blue/green car.

Later, Laura will bring some yellow roses to Ellie, grown from her garden and wrapped in blue paper, after she overhears Tom's phone call that establishes his appointed rendezvous (in order to prove his manhood) with Ellie. When Tom is about to leave for Ellie's place, Laura is dressed in a green evening gown. Tom's blue suit still represents the "little boy" who, under the regulatory control of the social order, desperately seeks to become a "regular guy." Blue is both the little boy and the social demand of that boy's masculine behavior. Tom's acceptance of yellow fulfills the acceptance of "gentleness" into the enforced masculinity of blue. This blending of blue and yellow is Laura's urgent plea to imbue the hypermasculine structure with its deprived gentleness, as well as to inject herself with the blue that is missing in her life.

Minnelli considered film a painter's canvas upon which the admixture of colors would work in harmony, yet never achieve an exact relationship to the colors in the "real" world. His love of Whistler, van Gogh, and Matisse points to his stylistic echoing of these painters' use of color to aestheticize fleeting moments of time and space.[41] These painters' brush strokes did not seek to simulate and fix an identical replica of "reality"; rather they rendered the color of the "real world" as they saw it. When Minnelli stated that the film must be considered a "situation as real life," it is in the context of placing that situation within the film-maker's point of view. The cinema afforded Minnelli the opportunity to explore his painterly aesthetics in "real life."

Peter Lehman, speaking in terms of normative masculinist representation, argues that cinematic representation depends upon a "realist" aesthetic to maintain ideological masculinist meaning. "Our culture asserts," Lehman suggests, "and realist representation participates in reinforcing the belief of a fixed relation between the male body and connotations of masculinity—to be a strong man is to look like a strong man, and to be a weak man is to look like a weak man."[42] If the Hollywood film depends upon "realist" representations to subtend normative practices of masculinity, Minnelli's aestheticized mise-en-scène (a transgression of the "real") serves to disrupt those normative representations. Through his process of aestheticization, Minnelli makes visible American hypermasculinity by placing his men within a textual place that does not match the anticipated Hollywood equation of "realist" mise-en-scène equals "strong and powerful" men. In effect, those "real" men are made to look ridiculous and, indeed, hyperbolic in their masculine constructions when placed within Minnelli's aestheticized text.

In *Tea and Sympathy*, Minnelli's dispersion and re-assigning of color realigns the cultural dictates of marking and foreclosing identity; color in a Minnelli film refuses to stabilize meaning. His colors blend with one another, disseminate at multiple emotional levels of the text, and, thereby, ironically play with the

historical and cultural assumptions ("pink for girls, blue for boys") which seek to totalize representations of meaning and identity.

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Notes

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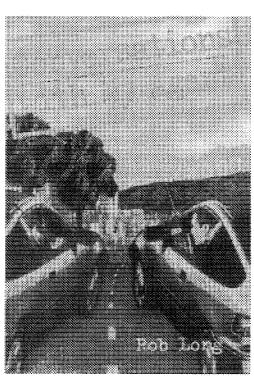
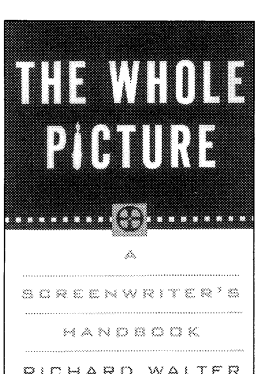
1. The story of the making of *Tea and Sympathy* is well documented—especially the events involving the M.P.A.A., the Legion of Decency, and MGM. See Jerold Simmons, "The Production Code Under New Management: Geoffrey Shurlock, *The Bad Seed* and *Tea and Sympathy*," in *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 2–10. See also Stephen Harvey's *Directed by Vincente Minnelli* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 247–51.
2. Memo dated 26 April, 1955. All sources regarding the interactions among the M.P.A.A., the P.C.A., the Legion of Decency, and MGM, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the MGM Production Code files held at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library.
3. Anonymous, *The Reporter*, 25 September, 1956, pp. 3, 11.
4. The play's ending proves somewhat complicated insofar as the ambiguity of its ending is not completely free of homophobic conditions. As we will see, the suggestion in any way that one was a homosexual in 1950s America—or 1990s America for that matter—was a slanderous act.
5. Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet* (1981. New York: Harper and Row, rev. ed., 1987), p. 112.
6. Ibid., p. 114. Emphasis added.
7. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 3. It is especially instructive to consider Sedgwick's work in terms of the discursive practices within the making of this film and the homophobic weight which is carried by those practices as they are constituted within Hollywood. As Sedgwick later posits: "the establishment of the spectacle of the homosexual closet as a presiding guarantor of rhetorical community, of authority—someone else's authority—over world making discursive terrain . . . extends vastly beyond the question of the homosexual" (230).
8. I'd like to thank Ed O'Neill for numerous discussions on issues of homosociality and homosexuality as well as for allowing me to read his unpublished paper, "Poisonous Queers." (Delivered at the Berkeley Conference on Violence and Cinema, Spring, 1993.)
9. Robert Anderson, *Tea and Sympathy* (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 94.
10. John Boswell. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 274.
11. G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying* (1936. Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, rpt. 1966), p. 109.
12. Ibid., p. 110.
13. Ibid. Emphasis added.
14. Robert Lynd, "In Defence of Pink," in *In Defence of Pink* (London: J. M. Dent, 1937), p. 2.
15. Ibid., pp. 6–7.
16. Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Moment: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Moment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
17. Sinfield, p. 74.
18. Chauncey, p. 113.
19. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 42.
20. Quoted in ibid.
21. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. 293.
22. Quoted in Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 43. I'd like to thank Marc Siegel for pointing out this material.
23. Quoted in ibid.
24. Anderson, according to Shurlock's memo which recounts the transaction between Anderson and Goldwyn, originally conceived of the film version for "art house" and European markets. This transaction also highlights the centrality of the "charge of homosexuality" as "malicious." See above, note 4. Emphasis added.
25. M.P.A.A. memo, 2 November, 1953. When MGM finally had won the rights to the film, Schary would define the boy's problem as a "fear of sexual impotence" (M.P.A.A. memo, 29 April, 1955).
26. Dore Schary, *Heyday* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979). Emphasis added.
27. Harvey, p. 249.
28. *Look*, no. 19, 17 May, 1955, pp. 52–60.
29. The Kinsey Report clearly had much to do with "homosexuality" finding its space of utterance in the American vernacular. The word "homosexual" in the article is mentioned only once to suggest its possible existence. But even here in the *Look* article, the utterance is lumped with the "new" social anomalies of heterosexuality: "It is believed by some that male homosexuality is increasing, and there probably is much more 'petting' and 'necking' between young men and women today." Homosexuality is "believed by some" to be on the "increase," but this "believed" is at best merely an hypothesis because it certainly remains unseen.
30. Thomas Pryor, "MGM Solves Its *Tea and Sympathy*

Script Problem," in the *New York Times*, 25 September, 1955. Emphasis added. While Berman is technically right that the word "homosexual" is not mentioned in the play, "queer" is used as well as rather blatant inferences to what the "suspicion" is all about.

31. Schary, pp. 311–12.
32. Ibid., p. 5. It seems that there were two camps at MGM regarding Schary. One camp was frustrated by his continuous push for the "message film" and his undermining of the import of the traditional MGM entertainment vehicles, while the other camp saw him progressively moving the studio forward.
33. Mise-en-scène is understood here as everything that the director chooses to put within the filmic frame (props, wardrobe, lighting, *bodies*). While this essay focuses on Minnelli's use of color as a strategy for aestheticizing the socio-historical conditions of the narrative, my larger project considers Minnelli's use/choice of (in particular) the male body as an important variable in the aestheticization of the text. Peter Brooks's essay "Melodrama, Body, Revolution" begins to reconsider the body as the site which reveals (through its performance in melodrama) its historical and disciplined inscription. See Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama, Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: BFI, 1994), pp. 11–24.
34. A number of Hollywood films made during this period, such as Ed Dymtryk's *Crossfire* (1947) or Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), exhibit the hyper-masculinity of the homosocial. One can also turn to certain genres that depend upon a homosocial make-up (the Western, the gangster or crime film, etc.).
35. Sedgwick shows how this masculine anxiety gets played out juridically. "Homosexual panic" is the popular defense whereby a perpetrator of violence against a gay person claims his "supposed uncertainty about his own sexual identity. . . . " This defense "asserts [that there is] one distinct minority of gay people, and a second minority, equally distinguishable from the population at large, of 'latent homosexuals' whose insecurity about their own masculinity is so anomalous as to permit a plea based on diminution of normal moral responsibility." *Epistemology*, p. 20.
36. Vincente Minnelli and Hector Arce, *I Remember It Well* (Hollywood, CA: Samuel French, 1990. Originally published Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), p. 45.
37. Brooks, p. 22.
38. Charles Reynolds, "An Interview with Vincente Minnelli," in *Popular Photography*, July 1962, pp. 106–07, 116, 107.
39. Anderson, p. 4.
40. Ibid., p. 18.
41. For a discussion of Minnelli's relationship to painting see my "Vincente Minnelli and Queer Modernism," in the forthcoming anthology *Missing Persons: Gays, Lesbians, and the Hollywood Studio System*, ed. George Custen (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998). See also Minnelli, *I Remember It Well*, pp. 43–55.
42. Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 100.





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"One Life to Live": Erika Slezak as Viki/Princess (left) and Robin Strasser as Dorian

The Retold Melodrama, Soap Opera, and the Representation of Reality

> For many people the ultimate praise for a movie is that it is realistic, believable, real. In fact, this doesn't mean that the movie is realistic/believable/real but that the movie proves that some aspect of one's life is realistic/believable/real, ostensibly by duplicating it.
> —Jonathan Rosenbaum
> *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies*

Alfred Hitchcock's melodrama *Spellbound* (1945) exemplifies the tendency in mass culture to sacrifice reality on the altar of desire. As the film delivers a wobbly attempt to establish the real in opposition to the amnesiac deliriums of its central character, John Ballantine (Gregory Peck), we are forced to choose between pleasure and verisimilitude. Ballantine's saga enthralls as he begins by claiming the identity of a Doctor Edwards only to find he must either discover his "true" self or be condemned for the murder of the man with whom he has confused himself. However, the central action, a suspenseful imitation of the psychiatric process—purportedly Ballantine's deliverance into the real—relies on pure manipulation. Pleasure is the choice, but at a cost. The so-called analysis culminates in a version of self-discovery so hopelessly entangled with audience yearnings for simple solutions that the cure is as fantasy-ridden as the disease.

Certainly, *Spellbound* is not commercial filmdom's last word on melodrama and reality. Later, Hitchcock himself proved that Hollywood could use the ploys of amnesia and narrative repetition to explore (rather than exploit) the troubling tic-like emotional responses it provokes. *Vertigo* (1958) shows how a *feigned* melodramatic amnesia "story" can pull spectatorial passion into a web of manipulative contrivance. Yet in producing a shock of recognition that enthrones truth at the expense of joy in the process of

its reality-testing, *Vertigo* provokes still more questions, ones central to the present inquiry. Are both pleasure and authenticity possible at the same time in this genre? Are there circumstances that permit popular melodrama to operate reflexively as a reality-bearing experience, without painfully rejecting its own pleasures and seductions?

As I see it, the answer is yes. And in fact, the combination of retold melodrama and amnesia is precisely the key to an inclusive realism, but not as Hollywood—even Hitchcock—has constituted it. Rather, it is the way melodrama works in another venue—for example, in the story of Victoria Lord (Erika Slezak), told on a daytime television soap opera called "One Life to Live"—that has the most to tell us about melodrama's potential.

Through a cycle of repetitions, "One Life" achieves some fascinating and unique collisions between reality and melodrama to which not even Hitchcock could lay claim. Initially, Victoria (Viki) engages in psychiatric revelation of the *Spellbound* variety, with all its attendant "eureka-izing." However, in Viki's story, the original discoveries merely *seem* to solve her mystery. As we shall see, when Viki tries to carry on after her "moment of clarity" (much like Scottie in *Vertigo*) she learns that "objective" reality is only a creation of what we think we know; but as her story confronts many new perspectives on old insights, it leaves us with more than a polarized choice between self-delusion and self-knowledge.

The presence in Viki's story of a deconstruction that does not neutralize melodramatic pleasure is indicative of more than the achievements of its specific creators. It alerts us to a distinctive characteristic of American daytime serials, one of the more compelling reasons that, as a feminist critic and former soap opera writer, I find that this newest form of melodrama has much to teach us about the capacity of the genre for a simultaneous realism and delight. If it resembles its Hollywood cousins in its pervasive dependence on excessively manipulated boilerplate conventions, soap opera (unlike the movies)—because of the repetitions required by its structure—continually reverts to its scenes of recognition in a way that permits popular culture an unexpected kind of introspection. Like Ulysses, the soap opera viewer is granted the boon of enjoying the siren call of melodrama without being destroyed by it.

We can begin to understand the rewards of Viki's journey into her forgotten past, and other similar journeys on daytime television, only after we abandon stereotypical perceptions of soap opera's structure fostered by the "yenta factor": the tendency to discuss soap narrative as if it were gossip, repetitive but picaresque. In fact, soap opera narrative structure is a teleological system of reiterations—much like a wave formation—in which a cycle of recurrences arises from within an original infusion.[1] After any enduring soap opera plot appears to have come to a familiar melodramatic conclusion, it will then proceed to yield many reversals of the original closure, a process of repetition which I shall refer to as the Return. The first Return opens the possibility of reflexivity; subsequent repetitions tend to bring the drive for clean solutions into increasing tension with a self-conscious appreciation of the problematic nature of our hopes.

Still, the naked Return is not usually bursting with potential for self-consciousness. In the same way that Hitchcock probed our compulsions in *Vertigo* by folding closed narrative on itself through a drama of memory lapses, the narrative device of amnesia brings out the inherent openings for self-awareness in the soap opera Return. Indeed, without the strategy of amnesia, the Return in soap opera may very well misfire, plunging the story into unproductive contradictions, as hilariously satirized in *Soap Dish* (1991), in which a character previously decapitated on screen is brought back. By contrast, soap opera amnesia, despite the many jokes about it, tends to raise narrative contradictions generated by the Return to the status and meaning of paradox. Together, repetition and amnesia create levels of divided consciousness in the soap opera audience, a precondition for reflexivity. Certainly, it is hard to say how many daytime enthusiasts are aware of the potential for self-consciousness in their favorite serial—the bean counters are determined to interview the least educated segment of the soap opera audience. Nevertheless, when amnesia inflects plot repetition, all viewers de facto experience soap opera's Rashomon effects.

At the very least, the amnesiac Return engages the soap viewer in an uncanny sense of the catacombs under any seemingly discrete event. At its full power, it makes us reflect on that most basic of all experiences of the spectator of melodrama, the willing suspension of disbelief—but without unweaving the rainbow of the narrative it revisits. As the soap narrative reviews a prior closure, the viewer retains the original magic of the original closure, but in addition also experiences a distancing effect that revivifies alternative, hitherto unexpressed possibilities within the original situation. At this point, the viewer committed to traditional narrative may feel mocked for her/his former suspension of disbelief and reject soap opera. However, viewers

who develop a taste for soap opera experience exhilaration at this simultaneous encounter with both the closure and something it had previously rendered invisible.

In the early days of soap opera, when little of what is really troubling about daily life could be addressed directly, the amnesiac Return was precipitated by vaguely defined forms of memory loss brought on by serious, but not psychologically illuminating daily traumas (for example, automobile accidents, blows to the head). The afflicted character became oblivious to her "real" identity. The amnesiac hiatus provided only veiled insights into the problems of female and male identity, domestic violence, and sexuality, and even those mildly suggestive revelations were eventually contextualized as temporary disturbances.

As amnesia has evolved in soap opera, it now tends to involve personality fragments that blur the distinctions between the "normal" behavior of the character and the repressed self (or selves). Dissociative identity disorder, as the most current form of amnesia in the soap narrative, sharply questions ordinary norms and often reveals a troubling patriarchal bias in melodramatic conventions. What remains is for critics fortified by a knowledge of media history and theory to break the taboos against soap opera and engage it, that we may begin a fruitful consideration of soap opera's almost unprecedented ability to grant to melodrama a unique (nonsatiric) form of self-awareness.

Contrary to popular belief, the soap opera team's search for new narrative energy in old situations is not an act of desperation or laziness, but part of the aesthetic of the form itself. The aesthetics are fascinating to contemplate, and always complicated by the team's engagement in the power politics of network restrictions. (After all, some of what was repressed originally was repressed at network behest.) From experience, I know that even a best-case scenario of this head-butting between soap team and network executives is not a gentle one. However, the time factor on soap opera tends to operate in favor of the industry's best creative impulses—to be distinguished from the creators themselves, who are often fired even while the momentum they set in motion carries inexorably forward.

The Next Wave

Not only is "One Life to Live" one of the best-written, -acted, and -produced of the soap operas, but it is a crucial part of the history of amnesia in soap opera. It was with this daytime television serial that its creator, Agnes Nixon, morphed the early radio and television version of soap opera amnesia into the new amnesia narrative of the split personality. The impetus for Nixon's creation of the serial "One Life to Live" was the profound interior schism initiated in Viki by her problematic father. (Nixon's creation reflects, in a much transformed way, her own troubled relationship with her father.) With psychological accuracy, Nixon depicted an ideal heroine whose official consciousness periodically blanked out, to be taken over by a radically different consciousness, that of Niki, an antiheroine and contrasting witness to the events of Viki's life. This innovation has proven to be spectacularly

Slezak as Princess (left) and Strasser as Dorian

© Ann Limongello

fruitful for soap opera and has been borrowed more than once by every extant daytime serial.

Many readers who are curious about soap opera as a genre may also have little firsthand experience of Nixon's groundbreaking dissociative identity narrative. For almost 30 years, successive creative teams on "One Life" have been playing with the continual reverberations of the tyranny of Victor Lord (Ernest Graves, originally) over his daughter, Viki. Despite Victor's death in 1976, the show gains most of its energy (and Emmy awards) when it returns to Viki's original melodramatic struggle with her shadow, Niki, who was created to help Viki cope with what at first was perceived as nothing more (or less) than humiliating treatment at the hands of her socially powerful father.

Certainly viewers experienced the usual delights of melodrama in the original solution of her story, when Viki seemed to free herself of her personality disorder. "One Life"invented the scenario of James'/ Wyler's *The Heiress*, when Viki was liberated for life and love upon discovering that her terror of sexuality and love—despite her obvious competence as heir to her father's financial empire—was rooted in her father's despotism.[2] But viewers experienced even more—highly unusual—gratifications in the persistence of her internal anxieties despite the neatness and euphoria of the original closure. With the necessary Return, Viki's conventional melodrama of the woman who desires to be both sexual and independent began to more fully reflect the realities of such a woman than have previous media fictions. In their turns, the kinds of women portrayed by Bette Davis and Katherine Hepburn in all their films, Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis in *Thelma & Louise* and Kirstie Alley in "Cheers" have all learned the futility of seeking both sexuality and independence. It was therefore a matter of significance that Viki initially arrived at a more cheerful melodramatic fantasy. Even more significantly, the Returns have complicated that hope, bringing it closer to most women's lives without collapsing Viki's aspirations. Instead of at last receiving the traditional "no," Viki has become a Sisyphean figure, repeatedly pushing her boulder back up the hill.

With each Return cycle, Viki's mystery has questioned all commonplaces about her dilemma—she neither dies of her contradictions nor is cured by the conventional remedies available through patriarchy. Indeed, the 1995 Return has brought soap opera closer than ever to asserting what it has continuously implied since its inception: that nothing at all is possible until we explore the lacunae in our conscious awareness caused by the collision between what we are supposed to think about paternal power and what we know to be true.[3]

Viki's story could not stop with the mere acknowledgement of her powerful father's bullying and humiliation; it had to arrive at the extreme violation perpetrated on her—revealed in 1995 to be repeated sexual abuse. The original cure was not disavowed; doubt was simply cast on cures achieved by the mere acknowledgement of the wounds inflicted by the intrusions of patriarchy at its extremes. Viki's Returns have more than implied that they must be acknowledged in their seriousness—here portrayed as Viki's perhaps irrevocable personality fragmentation. The 1995 Return made it clear that confronting and coping with Niki was only the tip of the dissociative identity iceberg. Formerly invisible, an alternative identity ("alter") called Jean emerged as the gateway personality typical of dissociative identity disorder—now visible as the strategist who coordinated Niki with Viki's needs to hide the secret of the incest.

Moreover, viewers saw that Jean was coordinating many more fragments, and they saw a ceaseless and harrowing internal tension generated by the complexity of contending with Victor's trespasses. Hidden under Viki's ideal heroine facade, aside from the trampish Niki, are Princess, the molested seven-year-old Viki who never ceases to cry in terror, and Tommy, a teenaged boy fragment who ceaselessly rages about Viki's victimization. Viki even contains a fragment that works for the undoing of Jean's design for living: Tori, a 19-year-old liberation terrorist who wants to reveal the incest. To add to the confusion, while Tori works to pull the rug out from under Jean, she is herself menaced—by Viki's internalization of Victor Lord as a self-destructive fragment of her psyche. Viki's "Victor" personality fragment threatens punishment if Tori breaks the code of silence, and actually drives Viki to mutilate her arm with a piece of glass after the secret is voiced. Through the re-vision of Viki, the 1995 cycle reflected on matters evaded by the original closure and even by subsequent Returns: the seemingly inexplicable refusal of Viki's inner division to heal and the strange circumstances surrounding her father's death, both allowed to become troublesome to the audience because of soap opera's potential for reflexivity. (In traditional narrative they would have been disavowed to facilitate closure.)

In 1976, Victor Lord died, seemingly at the hands of one Dorian—Victor's second wife, a contemporary of Viki's and her nemesis. Lord's death was originally screened à la Bette Davis in *The Little Foxes*, when

Dorian (Nancy Pinkerton, at that time) was less than prompt in retrieving Victor's heart medication during an attack of angina. Given Dorian's position on this show as a conventional "tiger woman," the deed itself was not peculiar. What was odd was that, despite soap opera's general compulsion to mete out punishments to fit any crime, "One Life" had swept Dorian's dark deed under the rug. Similarly strange was that given soap opera's wavelike structure—once swept, the deed attained the power of Viki's persistent internal wound to become a potentially fruitful narrative "growing tip"—this narrative element remained latent for years.

There was a method to this madness, and it had much to do with network suppression of Viki's plot issues. Sharply diverging from the practices of good soap opera writing, the network executives supported the decision of Joe Stuart, the executive producer at that time, to evade playing out the consequences of Dorian's actions, considering themselves protected by the fact that Dorian had not directly killed Victor: he survived Dorian's calculated neglect, but never returned home from the hospital. Stuart's initial strategy was devised to avoid sending Dorian to jail and thus losing this dynamic character. Nor was the show ready to call it quits with Dorian two years after Victor's death scene, when Robin Strasser took over the role. Strasser assumed that her role would endure for no more than a year or two because Dorian would eventually be apprehended by the law. However, Joe Stuart, still executive producer, responded to her question about that issue during her audition: "Look into my eyes. I am the executive producer, and I say it never happened" [interview with Strasser].

But the audience didn't buy it. The loose end frayed the surface of "One Life" until the 1995 Return, continuing to trouble Strasser, Slezak, and the audience—which became increasingly vocal in its objection to this evasion. Audience desires were at last satisfied by the 1995 Return, in which the original coldness of Dorian's withholding of the medicine remained, but was now complicated by Dorian's revelation of her knowledge of Victor's abuse of his daughter, and by the revelation of a further attack on Victor in his hospital room. As the 1995 Return reviewed the death, Victor might have recovered, had not Tori emerged during a hospital visit by the dutiful Viki and taken advantage of Victor's weakened condition to finally express her fury at him, smothering him with a pillow.[4] In the Return, Victor's murder is discovered to have been initiated by Dorian but completed by Viki, as a part of her secret life. Both major narrative suppressions were, as it turned out, connected to each other.

This highly acclaimed Return did not air without a fight. The show tap-danced around its most dynamic narrative material until the network was addressed by advocates to whom the network had a reason to be responsive. They raised their voices successfully at a time when the floodgates guarding very sensitive material could be allowed to burst, well after the famous Laura (Genie Francis) on "General Hospital" had won the right for soap opera heroines to defend themselves to the death against sexual violation, and well after incest had become possible as an overt narrative issue. Nevertheless, despite all the progress, each new address to explosive topics is a new fight, and in such instances the writing team alone can rarely prevail, as the networks see the writers as invisible to the fans and therefore expendable. In such negotiations, power tends to lie with actors deemed irreplaceable, and such was the case with "One Life to Live."

The immensely popular (five-time Emmy award winner) Erika Slezak and Robin Strasser, the current and most brilliant of "One Life"'s Dorians, together became the catalyst for the release of the 1995 Return. From years of working together, Slezak and Strasser have been marked to the bone with the wave patterns of Viki's story, and they saw the solution to the problem of Viki's interior schism and Dorian's role in Victor's death as part of the longstanding rivalry between the two women: Dorian—jealous of Viki's privileged, beloved position—and Viki—exasperated by Dorian's uncanny ability to turn her life inside out. For years, although Victor Lord has been the root cause of Viki's amnesia (and her narrative Returns), Dorian has often been the immediate cause, intentionally provoking in Viki crises that would weaken her and give Dorian a competitive edge. For Slezak and Strasser, there was a visceral and rational rightness to the movement of the strange, involuntary partnership between the two women into a narrative Return that would simultaneously get to the heart of Viki's shattered personality, the nagging suspicions that remained about Victor's demise, and the love-hate relationship between the two female characters.

Two years previous to the sexual abuse story that aired in 1995, Robin Strasser and Erika Slezak had pitched an incest/abuse story line to Linda Gottleib, then the executive producer of "One Life" [interview with Slezak; hereafter Slezak, Malone, etc.]. The Strasser/Slezak version included the discovery not only of Viki's abuse, but also of Dorian's abuse as a child, opening up for both women a plot that would

explain their repulsion/fascination. In the proposed Return cycle, Dorian would inadvertently reveal to Viki what Victor had done to her, again provoking a crisis, but this one would deepen the exploration of their mutual fascination as a mutual mirroring, each captivated and horrified by the road not taken in response to the same early experience of dread: where Viki fragmented, Dorian grew armor. Although Michael Malone, who came on the show as head writer in 1991, had been interested, Gottleib did not follow through on the suggestion because of network politics. There was so much concern that Agnes Nixon, who had used her own biography metaphorically to create Viki, would not approve that no one asked her opinion, and the abuse story was shelved [Malone].

Two years later, when Susan Bedsow Horgan took over from Gottleib, Strasser went to Slezak—the most politically powerful actor on the show—again suggesting the abuse story, and suggesting also that the story include a proliferation of personalities for Viki [Strasser]. This time, because of the attitude of the new executive producer, Nixon was consulted. To the surprise of some who should have known better, Nixon—a storyteller before all else, and a consummate professional—did not object, and the story went forward. Malone worked with Nixon; he also studied early scripts and plot summaries, and old videotapes. And he consulted with Faith Catlin, a psychiatrist who specializes in multiple personality disorder [Jean Passanante]. (Catlin, in a previous career as an actress on the now defunct soap opera "Ryan's Hope," had remarked in an unrelated earlier conversation with Passanante that Viki sounded like an abused child.)

The 1995 Return had other benefits as well. It also deepened the portrait of the first personality fragment, Niki, who had originally been portrayed in rather mild terms to protect Viki's character. Slezak always regarded this as unnecessary and frustrating [Slezak]. In the 1995 Return, Niki is grittier, revealed as a part of Viki created to enjoy sex indiscriminately so that there

could be a part of Viki that didn't mind "that daddy was doing it to her" [Slezak].

The 1995 Return also promised to make waves, in the best soap opera sense of the term. As Viki's amnesiac amnesia went on air, the "One Life" team had to turn its attention to again finding new plot developments from unresolved elements of old materials, and they now began to seriously consider the Slezak-Strasser recommendation that Dorian's role in Viki's life could now be explained by the abuse of Dorian as a child. Dorian's ruthlessness would now be visible in all its complexity as more than the cruel expediency characteristic of the powerful, sexual woman in the American media. She would now be visible as a gallant survivor of her father. (If such a story went forward, it would be significant from a gender studies perspective, giving a new, reflexive vision of melodrama's dark temptress. It would be yet another reason for rethinking beliefs that soap opera is one more patriarchal plot against women's aspirations.)

In this case, as in most, the soap opera Return began in a tentative way, without any commitment to the new idea. As I started on this essay, Malone and his

Slezak as Viki (right) and her alters Niki (opposite, left); Princess (opposite, right); Tommy (below, left); and Jean (below, right)
(All stills © Ann Limongello)

team were beginning to prime the audience for that possibility. Dorian's backstory already included two sisters in mental institutions. While Viki went into therapy to confront her terrible secret, Dorian welcomed to her bosom two "junior vixen" nieces, the daughters of her lost and broken sisters. Pondering a world divided between "feelers" and "fighters," she began to voice fears for her own daughter, whom she understands as a "feeler." Malone was entertaining a rightness in this possible story projection in which he saw a way of dramatizing what had not previously been explored. Should Malone's team play Dorian's

abuse, everything would be in position for Viki to look at all those heretofore submerged elements in Dorian, as Dorian had observed her "alters." This would portend new depths and contradictions for the fascinating Viki-Dorian relationship.

Although it was almost certain that Dorian's silence about her childhood would be a matter of choice, not amnesia, it was quite clear that should it rise to the surface, that story would be highly dependent on Viki's amnesia plot. Tantalizingly, when Strasser again came forth with a story idea related to the original abuse plot, it suggested even more cogently how dramas of consciousness may follow upon amnesia stories on soap opera. Strasser's idea, suggested to her by *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), projected Dorian and Viki both finding themselves in the same mental institution (both there because of the mis-

guided decisions of loved ones), each fighting to save herself and unwillingly needing to look to the other as a comrade [Malone, Strasser].[5] The imaginative possibilities intrinsic to this vision of melodramatic coincidence speak eloquently of the particular qualities of the genre: active roles for women who must not only search out what has been hidden by their own narratives but then deal with the opprobrium attached to going beyond conventional restrictions.

Clearly, as the "One Life" team expanded Viki's story, new gratifications engaged the spectator in a dialogue with the hopes of bliss that melodramatic narratives raise. Yet the repetitions did not require that we divorce ourselves from the old stereotypes that reflect many of our ideals and desires. Rather they reflected a world in which our desires must contend with the fragility and insufficiency of these stereotypes.

The Rewards of Repetition

The "One Life" team operates as a collaborative group of storytellers who perform the paradigmatic narrative task of soap opera: the reproduction of our discovery that we have hidden much from ourselves behind easily available images of who we are. Malone and his team created an opportunity for reflexive consciousness about our desires to resolve our histories to one true version, in imitation of the closed forms of conventional narrative. As this kind of narrative mirror, soap opera becomes increasingly interesting in terms of the intellectual ferment about the potentially deleterious effect of closed narrative on our culture. For those of us who believe that a people without stories is an impossibility, there is a great need to evolve narrative models that build into the potential tyranny and repressions of storytelling a place for the heterogeneous quality of diversity and difference—as in Jean-François Lyotard's rumination about the narrative representation of the real. Lyotard proposes that the reality-bearing aspect of narrative is that, at its most authentic, it is not predicated on the narrative illusion of harmony, but on the tensions between that illusion and the many elements in the narrative it represses to achieve the appearance of seamlessness and inevitability. For Lyotard, art reflects reality in its reverberations of the irreversible anachrony in all culturally derived forms.[6]

The key word, anachrony—a state of unresolved contradiction—is here used by Lyotard in the context of his assumption that the making of meaning requires the systematic play of such dissonance. Lyotard asserts that a total harmony inevitably creates *false* meaning—what has been called bad faith in art. My point is that, through the use of amnesiac repetition, soap opera has evolved a successful mass media representation of anachrony in the best Lyotardian sense. Thus we may say that amnesiac repetition in soap opera can engage a mass audience in a highly creative and vital experience of its culturally learned desires.

Insofar as soap opera Returns promote anachrony and avoid mechanical iteration of exact duplication, soap opera makes a necessary contribution to the humanization of the culture, if we believe the theorization of repetition in Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. In this groundbreaking study, Deleuze suggests that our lives are dominated by a mechanical repetition, rooted in industrial/corporate reproduction of identical sameness, that thwarts our experience of our own realities. Art, by contrast, he says, has the power to illuminate for us another kind of repetition that incorporates both the sameness that is part of the act of repetition and the all-important energy of divergence in the recurrence. Deleuze explores one of the social benefits of art as its ability to defeat deadening repetitions through vital ones: "The more our daily life appears standardized, stereotyped . . . the more art must be injected into it to extract from it that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition" (293).[7] By this standard, the repetitions in soap opera's amnesiac Returns are more than interesting narrative. They are readily accessible, seminal, positive influences in American society.

Both kinds of repetition can be found in soap opera. Needless to say, those repetitions most approximating assembly-line mass production fail to reflect the full possibilities of the form, and are genuinely inferior storytelling. However, public discourse about soap opera has been marked by an imbalance of attention to such failings. Often, such critiques contain major blind spots about soap opera's reversibility and ply the reader with misapplications of evidence. For example, "Women, Memory and Serial Melodrama," a recent article in *Screen*, makes the case that repetition and reversibility in soap opera mark the form as predominantly chaotic. It seeks to make the point, in large part, through the example of a shabby narrative turn on "Dallas": the infamous year that was belatedly revealed to be the dream of one of the characters while taking a shower. That is to say, the audience was suddenly directed to "believe" that none of the episodes shown on air that year had ever "really" taken place.[9]

The "Dallas" narrative to which the article refers is unquestionably an example of chaos. However, if we mean to take narrative issues seriously, we must also take seriously the definition of narrative forms, and in such a precise context "Dallas," a seasonal, weekly melodrama, has little formal relevance to the daily soap opera form. A show like "Dallas" screens 20 to 25 episodes per season, while a daytime soap opera screens approximately 260 episodes per year. So, while both "Dallas"and daytime serials may qualify as melodrama, the numbers defy any meaningful resemblance regarding reversibility and/or repetition between the two forms.

"Dallas"'s debacle parallels soap opera Returns in only the most perfunctory way, and not at all in terms of the energy of the amnesiac Return. First, given the number of episodes in a soap opera year, erasure on that scale would not be a possibility. The worst that might happen is exemplified by the revisionism I encountered when a writing team of which I was a part decided that Alan Spaulding was NOT DEAD!!! ("Guiding Light," 1986). We had not hung ourselves with the stout rope of denial—Alan had not died onscreen. We did not erase the former incident, we simply made visible an alternate consequence to the one that had been inferred by his disappearance. However, nothing very interesting resulted from Alan's reappearance and his repetition of his old problems, and the team that succeeded mine sent him to narrative limbo again, this time to jail.

But if there is some small resemblance between the boredom created by both Alan's reappearance and "Dallas"'s wet dream, there is no resemblance at all between the "Dallas" incident and the amnesiac Return. The reversibility of the plot on "Dallas" did not contain within itself the opening for another repetition, as does the amnesiac form of recurrence. The events of "Dallas"'s narrative arcs made a poor job of total disavowal verging on a denial, something actually quite conventional in Hollywood melodramas, which routinely erase disruptive elements to achieve "satisfying" closure.

By contrast, the best-case scenario of the amnesiac repetition exemplified by "One Life to Live" is very good indeed: such a use of soap opera narrative structure divides audience consciousness about stereotypes of romantic love and stereotypes of social roles. Amnesia, studied by the field of psychology for its implications for repressions of traumatic memory, can now be examined by media studies as a plot device that builds into conventional melodrama the potential for reflexivity about narrative repressions.

The Mysteries of Ordinary Life

Not only does "One Life" construct the personality on the model of Sisyphus, who pushes not quite the same rock up not quite the same hill repeatedly, it also makes possible, through the Return, a subcutaneous look at the fissures in what initially appears to be a seamless social order. "One Life," at times brilliantly, suggests the anachrony of our relationships with social roles through the larger uses it makes of its interrogation of the basic personality of Viki, the conventional blonde heroine of melodrama. The desire connected with the image of such a person is never destroyed. However, as Viki's integration is postponed, the stereotype of the ideal "ordinary, normal" woman moves further out of reach, and we must inevitably recognize as problematic the ideal of the stable community that this stereotype supports.

During the 1995 Return, in the heart of mainstream media, the ordinary, bourgeois, WASP blonde wife and mother turned into a figure as mysterious as Rinehart, the enigmatic black man who becomes a walking contradiction in order to deal with an unjust white society in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. When we see Viki suddenly confronted with the incest she has repressed, we must also see that she has become a walking contradiction in order to deal with patriarchal power. Suddenly, the satisfactions of "ordinary" maternal melodrama attenuate into an enigma. We have, in the original resolution, the possibility of a stable community when Viki seemed to reach not only a truce with herself but also with Daddy. In the ordinary course of melodrama, this signals a healing of a temporary wound. Once past the father-daughter turmoil, Viki can ostensibly become the ideal mother of melodrama who operates as the communal shock absorber and unconditional source of nourishment. The Returns complicate this bliss, particularly the piercing vision of "One Life"'s 1995 Return. For, as Jean and Tori manipulate the lives of Viki's children—whom they do not acknowledge as their own—for the purposes of either hiding or exposing the incest secret, the clichéd all-giving mother confronts us as a person too wounded by the power of the father to carry out her social charge, except intermittently.

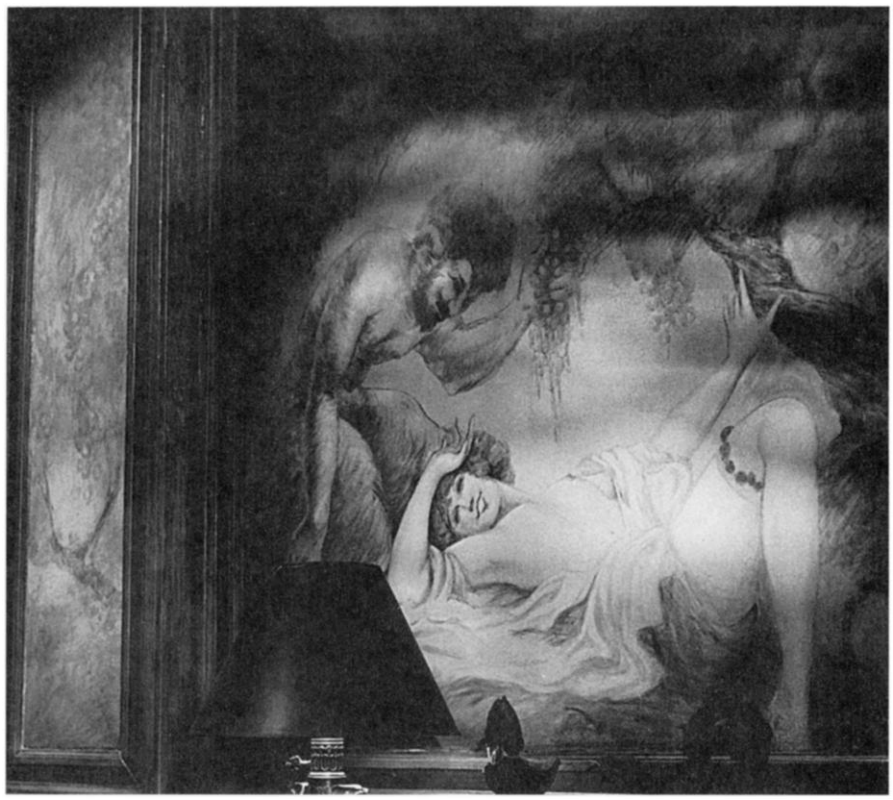
The mother love that in melodrama supports the ideal community becomes part of a pentimento, visible through scrapings of anger and desperation. Jean

seems to express Viki's affection for Viki's children, but behind their backs is visibly tormented by their touch, because for her intimate touch between parent and child is understandably freighted with terrifying feelings. Tori sweetly smiles Viki's smile as she surveys a blissful family gathering of Viki's children and sister in the family mansion, only to turn and exult in how she is going to bring their stable environment down. Even more beautifully complicated are those indeterminate moments when something of Viki's "natural womanliness" shows through the rage of her alters in relationship to Viki's daughter, Jessica. Distinguishing between the closeness of Viki and Jessica and the distance the alters feel from the girl, the show brilliantly portrays the ambiguity of the mother-daughter bond within patriarchy without demonizing Viki. Between Viki and Jessica there is the characteristic emotional empathy; between Tori and Jessica, only a kind of empathy on Tori's part with Jessica's ability to be critical of her privileged position as a "rich girl." The rebellious Tori can only value Jessica for the potential in her to reject the power that has secretly maimed Viki. So much is this the case that, when Tori burns down her father's house and accidentally traps Jessica within the flames, she seems prepared to leave her there and flee, until Viki emerges to rescue her daughter. Slezak herself did not know whether Tori would have gone back if Viki had not forced her way out. "I'd like to think that she was about to change her mind when Viki emerged," Slezak told me. However, what is significant is what appeared on-screen: the irresolvable paradox in the image of the ideal mother, a paradox that Lyotard suggests is the purpose of fiction. In 1995, Viki touched some painfully real nerves, baring the ways both the stereotypes and their failures haunt our perception of mothers in our culture.

At least as extraordinary is the complexity that "One Life"'s 1995 Return brings to Viki's link to Dorian. The portrayal of women's relationships is always fraught with danger in the mass media. One solution to the virtual taboo against representing female bonding has been the melodramatic cliché of the intimacy between women as competitive adversaries—a disguise of the powerful connection among women by demonizing it. Initially, the melodrama of Viki and Dorian portrayed them as the clichéd dark and fair feuding women, and all the melodramatic delights involved watching fair Viki gain ascendancy over the dark schemer. However, with each Return, the stereotypes have become complicated. It has become ever clearer that Dorian and Viki overlap in some ways. "Dorian is obsessed with Viki," Strasser commented to me—this desire to share Viki's identity and not the Lord fortune being the primary cause of Dorian's decision to marry the loathsome Victor. On her part, Viki is more than a little preoccupied by Dorian's temerity and strength. "Viki is continually stunned by the possibility that audacity like Dorian's can exist!" Slezak remarked about the relationship between the two women. The fascination smacks of projection.

By 1995, Dorian and Viki had—not completely humorously—been labelled as "One Life"'s supercouple, since the (considerable) pleasures of the many romances on the show have consistently paled in comparison with explosive revelations about the less obvious aspects of the intimacy between these pivotal female adversaries. Each Return has further winkled out the profound, though unacknowledged, bond between the two, and none more than the one in 1995. At that time, we saw that only Dorian knew that Victor had molested his daughter. Similarly, while over the years Viki's intimates have gained knowledge of Viki's "Niki fragment," Dorian was the first to see all of Viki's alters and feel the full force of their energy. She has been assaulted by Tommy for speaking the secret of the incest aloud to the repressed Viki. She has allied herself with Jean when they had mutual interests in keeping secrets. She has comforted Viki's eternally sobbing childhood fragment—at the time, the only person ever to do so. She is the only character to deal knowingly with Tori's terrorism. For Robin Strasser, playing Dorian meant that Dorian went through her own (figurative) version of a multiple personality disorder as she dealt with the dizzying anachronic realities of Viki's fragmentations. "One Life" is coming within shouting range of a unique (in mass culture) non-demonic representation of the enormous importance of the bond among women in dealing with the wounds inflicted by the gender imbalances in social organization.

It was through the Viki-Dorian relationship that "One Life" became poised to represent the destabilization in the community effected by the wounding of women through the power of the fathers. The conventional melodramatic assurance is that sinful fathers can be purged and the community be made whole—by good or reformed fathers. This original assurance on "One Life" was definitively complicated in 1995 when many familiar characters, who lack Dorian's awareness, found themselves blindly beset by Kafkaesque absurdities as Viki's alters went on the rampage. Because Viki's ideal persona defines her as



The designs of Victor Lord's secret room

© Ann Limongello

completely reliable, Tori and Jean, bringing to bear on Viki's friends and relatives wildly divergent methods and purposes, shocked and badgered most of "One Life"'s characters into false emotional positions. As a result, most of Viki's friends, relatives, and even acquaintances were reeling from sudden and inexplicable emotional shifts around them. A proliferation of faux lovers, manufactured disclaimers of love, and actions that undermine communal structures replicated Viki's amnesia in the community. Viki's amnesia became a communal affair; nothing will ever fully heal the ruptures caused by the spread of Viki's repressions into community life.

Finally, often in connection with Dorian, a sensory destabilization complementing the narrative anachrony embedded Viki's fragmentation in the visual and sound design of the abuse story. Nonmimetic sound and interesting mirror images created visceral paradoxes for the audience, primarily in scenes that took place in Victor's secret room in the Lord mansion, newly revealed as the original site of the incestuous abuse. Viki's transitions among alters was scored by dissonant sound that effectively set the viewers nerves on edge. Additionally, in the secret room, the camera guided us to suggestive images created by Jean's engineering of a glass prison for Dorian in order to protect Viki—once Dorian unwittingly revealed the incest to Viki (Dorian believed Viki knew). In a fascinating role reversal, Jean used Tommy to kidnap Dorian and then secured her in a glass enclosure in the secret room until Dorian agreed to maintain the incest secret. The scenes of Dorian's confinement were shot through with doubled images of Viki and Dorian; as they physically and emotionally struggled with each other, the confining glass served as a surface on which their images overlapped. The camera images of these superimpositions of images of the women marked them as individuals and also as layers of each other.

Another form of doubling was created by the juxtaposition of Dorian and Viki against the paintings with which Victor decorated his secret space. The walls, covered by images of young women in splayed-leg poses, willingly submitting themselves to the controlling gaze, presented the painful parameters of the lives of both Dorian and Viki, who furiously reject a role as the object of domination of any kind. The irony is still further complicated by an awareness in every soap watcher—deepened by the fanzines—that they are looking at women who *are* actresses and who are willingly submitting themselves to spectatorial view. The multiple realities of wounded

and wounding women in Victor Lord's America—women on both sides of the camera—become a poignant and highly reflexive part of the melodrama.

"One Life to Live" is representative of the way in which soap opera as public spectacle indulges traditional melodramatic fantasies. A close reading of the amnesiac Returns on any daytime serial—from the often puerile "Days of Our Lives" to the often incandescent "General Hospital"—will yield fascinating multiple takes on the same identity. Like all melodramatic forms, "One Life" and its fellow serials seem real because they flatter our preconceptions of what real life looks like while they produce emotional intensities through manipulative conventions. However, by means of the amnesiac Return, soap operas also proffer another reality, best evoked in words from the late, superb soap opera "Santa Barbara": the "shock every human child must endure, the shock of knowing you have never been who you were told you were."

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Notes

I am indebted to both Laura Fissinger, of *Soap Opera Weekly,* and Denise Gonzalez, the WABC-TV publicist for "One Life to Live," for helping me to arrange interviews with Erika Slezak and Robin Strasser. I similarly acknowledge Ann Limongello, "One Life"'s set photographer, who not only made her archives available to me, but went on the set to take photographs of necessary images not already on file. Jason Bonderoff of *Soap Opera Weekly* generously helped me with details of the history of "One Life to Live."

1. The image of soap opera narrative as a system of waves was suggested by novelist Michael Malone, head writer of "One Life to Live" from 1991 to 1996. This and all subsequent references to Malone's statements and plans come from interviews I held with him on March 30, 1995, and July 10, 1995. All future allusions to the statements of artists in the soap opera creative community are also based on interviews I conducted, as follows: Erika Slezak (Viki), May 31, 1995; Robin Strasser (Dorian), April 4, 1995 and June 13, 1995; Jean Passanante (Associate Head Writer), July 10, 1995, all of whom I thank for their cooperation.
2. Martha Nochimson, *No End to Her: Soap Opera and the Female Subject* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993). I have dealt with Viki's original melodrama as a part of the development of a unique tradition of female subjects in chapter 2 (pp. 64–74). The present exploration builds on that foundation.
3. For the history of this theme, please see *No End to Her.*
4. At least initially, Strasser fought the 1995 Return as an inexcusable revisionism. "I know who killed Victor," she said, "and it's me." Others may well agree with her. What ought to be acknowledged, however, is that, as managed, "One Life"'s new look at an old story did not seek to deny what Dorian had done. In fact, we were forcefully reminded of it by most of the other characters as part of the drama of the new revelations, signifying how important the double vision is to the Return.
5. When I wrote this essay, firm plans for Viki's 1995 Return had only been made until the end of that year, which primarily involved the discovery that Viki's "alter" Tori had murdered Victor. The possible story of Dorian's abuse and the *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* story were only being considered by Michael Malone, who generously entrusted me with his highly confidential, albeit highly uncertain, work in progress. I was interested in chronicling the directions Malone was considering for "One Life," regardless of eventual production decisions, because my goal in this essay is to cast as much light on how the soap opera writing team works as on what actually appears on-screen. At this writing, Malone has left "One Life," and none of the ideas under discussion have been used.
   Of interest here, too, is Erika Slezak's vision of future plotting for Viki during this period of creation. "Why can't Viki live alone for a while?" was Slezak's question. "Why [when Viki is 'normally' involved with her ex-husband] does Viki need Clint's permission to cross the street?" In my terms, Slezak had in mind some Return to the elements of Viki's stereotypical submissiveness to men—obviously on the horizon once the problems of "normal" femininity are exposed in the incest plot. Time and the network have granted Slezak's wish: Viki has been an independent woman for a year now.
6. Lyotard expounds at length on narrative and reality in *Discours, Figure,* which is not yet available in English. For a useful English discussion of Lyotard's poetics, see Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3-52.
7. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
8. See for reference: Ernest R. Hilgard, *Divided Consciousness: Multiple Controls in Human Thought and Action* (New York: John Wiley, 1977); Lenore Terr, *Unchained Memories: True Stories of Traumatic Memories, Lost and Found* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
9. Mimi White, "Women, Memory, and Serial Melodrama," *Screen,* vol. 35, no. 4 (Winter 1994) pp. 336–53. White also asserts that narrative slippage is caused by extra-narrative pressures that she says "encourage [viewers] to configure their own relations to programs in personal terms that cannot be delimited or controlled by producers or writers" (349). However, this also tells us little about soap opera specifically, since the loss of a society unified by similar values is the primary problem for all modern cultural communication.

Film Reviews

Death and the Maiden

Director: Roman Polanski. Producers: Thom Mount, Josh Kramer. Writers: Rafael Yglesias, Ariel Dorfman, from Dorfman's play. Cinematographer: Tonino Delli Colli. Fine Line Features.

Paulina Escobar (Sigourney Weaver, right) points her gun at bruised and bandaged Roberto Miranda (Ben Kingsley)

I had already been in the United States for a few years when the war started in my homeland, the former Yugoslavia. As time passed, the images and reports of massacres, rape, shelling, and ethnic cleansing accumulated. And yet many of my American friends and acquaintances still could not see who was doing what to whom; they could not figure out their own position on this conflict. I asked them what made it so hard to see what was happening in this war, given the availability of daily reports and images. They said things like "*They* always talked about how complex the situation was," and that it was "hard to make up one's mind as to who is the aggressor and who the victim."

I would suggest that the difficulty in perception and understanding of this war stemmed from, among other factors, a mystifying verbal discourse that accompanied images which were in themselves unambiguous (i.e., the destruction of Vukovar, the daily siege of Sarajevo, the cleansing of Bosnia). This verbal discourse, a "voice over" the images, was made up not only of the Western reporter's text, but also of the speeches by both the attackers—who claimed that they were not responsible—and those who suffered the attack—and survived to accuse the others. A "balanced presentation" of aggressors and victims, giving opposing accounts of events, made my American acquaintances doubt the otherwise clear-cut images.

I realized only later that I knew better what was happening in my country simply because I had the advantage of a "reality check." In other words, I was getting firsthand information from many people in the area, which helped delineate truth from lie. My American friends did not have this reality check and had to rely solely on the representation provided by the media; consequently, they were much more affected by the differences between the stories told by victims and perpetrators. And so they remained doubtful and suspicious, and therefore passive.

When I first saw Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* in 1994, the familiarity of the situation struck me. Here we are again confronted by a situation that demands a judgment, but without any reality check to help us make it: two people who present different stories, each one claiming to be victimized by the other. We—the outside viewers—are left to figure out who is telling the truth.

An Outsider's Ignorance

As Lawrence Weschler observed, "*Death and the Maiden* might have served as an alternative title for well over half of Roman Polanski's movies."[1] Indeed, many of Polanski's films explore the victimization of a female character which ends with death—

either that of the character or of those who persecute her. In *Repulsion* (U.K., 1965), for example, the main character, Carol (Catherine Deneuve), an increasingly schizophrenic young Belgian woman living in London, senses with abnormal intensity all the very real abuses of the male gaze, touch, and intrusion upon her body and her private space. By the end of the movie she has stopped being the victim of a sexist society and has become a brutal murderer of the men who pursue her. In two of Polanski's American movies, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *Chinatown* (1974), a woman is victimized by being used as a womb to bear the child of rape by a devil—a literal devil in the first movie and a metaphorical one (the mythically evil and powerful Noah Cross, played by John Huston) in the second.

In *The Tenant* (France, 1976), a Polish immigrant in Paris (played by Polanski) gradually assumes the identity of a woman victimized by her surroundings to the point of suicide; and in *Tess* (France/U.K., 1980) a young girl (Nastassia Kinski) kills the man who seduced her and ruined her life, and is hung for the murder. In *Bitter Moon* (France/U.K., 1991), the dynamics of sexuality, power, and victimization unfold in a series of astonishing metamorphoses. A 40-ish American writer in Paris and a younger Parisian girl probe the depths of sexuality and sadism as they switch, in an increasingly deadly game, the positions of victim and victimizer.

Polanski's latest film, *Death and the Maiden* (U.S.A./U.K./France, 1994), explores these same themes but seems to be the first one to put the spectator in the uncomfortable position of not knowing who is actually the true victim. In many of Polanski's other movies the viewer is in the position of an "omniscient camera-narrator"—able to observe and grasp more than the film's characters can. Thus, for example, in Polanski's first feature movie, *Knife in the Water* (Poland, 1962), a young man who is presumed to be a nonswimmer falls from a boat into the sea, and the blame for his apparent drowning rests squarely on the older man who has been dominating their interaction and who now thinks he has inadvertently killed the younger man. We, however, know that this is not the case: we see the young man hiding behind a buoy, obviously not in any danger of drowning. In *Repulsion*, two men successively turn their backs to Carol and thus do not see—as we do—that she is coming at them with a heavy candlestick or a razor. The tension of these films (and obviously many others) is built precisely on characters' not seeing or knowing something that the viewer sees or knows. Or else the spectator is "allowed" to know at least as much as the main characters, for instance detective Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) in *Chinatown* or the husband (Harrison Ford) in search of his abducted wife in *Frantic* (U.S.A., 1988). We are also able to go back in time and see the characters' past through flashbacks, as in *Bitter Moon*, where the film continuously leaves the present time of a trans-Atlantic voyage and returns to the past in Paris. And sometimes we are even able to see the world through the eyes of one of the characters, as in *Repulsion* or *The Tenant*.

In short, Polanski's films usually allow us to assume the position of an omniscient spectator or of the film's characters. As such, we are granted a very unrealistic, and privileged, position, given that in "real life" we do not see the world through other people's eyes, nor are we usually present during the course of some private action involving other people, because such actions—whether amorous or murderous—mostly do not happen in front of an outsider. But it is precisely this voyeuristic position which is given to us by film, and that we have come to expect.

Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* constructs a very different viewer's position: following Ariel Dorfman's play, the film *restricts* the spectator's knowledge. In a solitary house near the coast of an unnamed Latin-American country shortly after the fall of a dictatorship, a woman named Paulina Escobar (Sigourney Weaver) claims that her husband's chance encounter, Dr. Roberto Miranda (Ben Kingsley), is the man who tortured her 15 years ago. Paulina beats this visitor unconscious with a gun, ties him to a chair, gags him with her panties, and wraps tape around his mouth. In front of her mortified husband, Gerardo (Stuart Wilson), she insists that even though she was blindfolded while being interrogated she can indeed identify Dr. Miranda as her torturer because she can recognize his voice, his smell, the way he laughs and the way he talks. She wants to force a confession from Miranda that would affirm the truth of her accusations. Miranda, on the other hand, keeps trying to convince her and her husband of his innocence.

We (the viewers) were not there when Paulina's tortures took place. Polanski's film does not allow any flashbacks which would vouchsafe us some hard facts about the events Paulina is describing, even if they did not reveal the identity of the torturer. Instead of opening up Dorfman's play to other locales and times (a customary practice in transforming a play into a film, but one that in this case would load the evenly balanced scales of ambiguity), Polanski leaves the action almost entirely in a closed space (the interior of a house), and even shortens the time of the play: the

original night and a day become one night. This confinement puts us in an uncomfortable state of ignorance and limitation that is not at all typical of film. It is not merely that we do not know what the characters know, but we can also *see* only what is happening here (one house) and now (one night). Our only way of finding out the truth about the past is through what Paulina and Miranda are saying or doing in the present. *Death and the Maiden* places us squarely and brutally within the limits of the "real-life" situation of an outside viewer. It is the ethical position of judge and jury, with unknown people playing out a trial in front of our eyes.

Polanski's film emphasizes the tragic dichotomy at the root of Dorfman's play: the inability of outsiders to know a truth known only to the insiders, and the inevitable pursuit of this knowledge by those same outsiders who cannot avoid the drama unfolding in front of them. The film demands that we decide and pass judgment; if *Paulina* is telling the truth, she was a victim of Miranda's sadistic torture and he deserves the harshest punishment; if *Miranda* is telling the truth, he is an innocent object of a deranged and brutal woman's vendetta.

But how can one make an ethical judgment based on questionable knowledge? How can we know if we are facing an alleged victim falsely accusing someone of being her/his torturer, thereby justifying his/her own present violence over them, or the opposite, in which a genuine victim tells the truth but is not believed? The viewer of *Death and the Maiden* is invited to make a judgment and, more importantly, to recognize that s/he makes a very similar type of judgment in real life, where his/her ability to do so (or inability and ensuing passivity) determines the fate of real human lives.

Rationality, Legality, and Medical Discourse

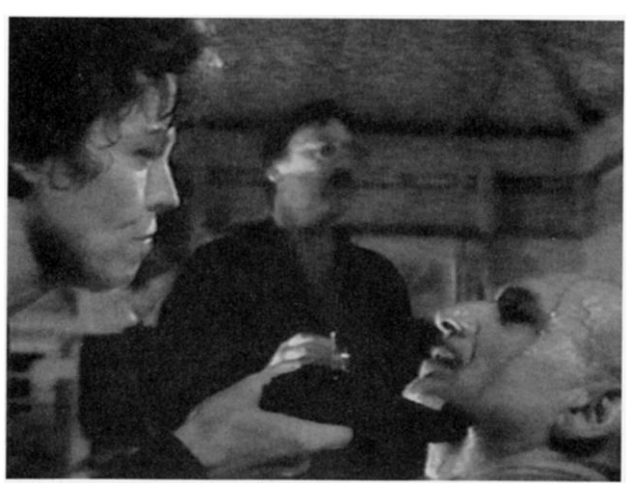
The position of the outside viewer is replicated within *Death and the Maiden* itself, in the character of Paulina's husband. He is a high-powered lawyer just appointed as the head of a commission for human rights abuses during the days of the military regime. Stuart Wilson gives a sensitive performance as a bespectacled, clumsy, and somewhat overweight lawyer whose masculinity is softened by his attire—a robe and slippers throughout much of the film. His relation to Paulina can be taken as indicative of the ways in which legal discourse and procedures deal with victims of violence. Escobar puts on his legal persona while talking to Paulina, and spells out the reasons why he thinks she is wrong. First, she does not have proof that Miranda is indeed the man she believes he is—one needs facts, visual identification, witnesses. Secondly, even if Miranda is guilty, he should be given a chance for a fair trial and defense. Escobar tries to fight Paulina's apparent frenzy and his own rising panic with legal logic and arguments: "You don't have any proof . . . the only evidence you have is your own testimony . . . you are not a reliable witness . . . trust me, any court in the land would tear you to pieces."

He questions Paulina, his voice increasingly like a trial lawyer's: "Isn't it true that five years ago in the Tabeli Café you heard the voice of a man that you recognized? . . . Isn't it a fact that you panicked on a bus last summer when a man touched your shoulder?" At the very beginning of this ordeal, he tells Paulina in total disbelief, "You were blindfolded!" implying that she could not possibly recognize her torturer. Paulina answers, "The voice." He echoes her own words, making them utterly suspicious: "His voice, that's it?!" She says, "That's enough for me," upon which her husband concludes, without a shadow of a doubt in his own pronouncement, "Pauli, you're ill."

Just as Escobar assumes his legal persona in trying to prove to Paulina that she is deluded, Dr. Miranda also makes use of professional expertise in his own defense. Ben Kingsley fashions a brilliant portrayal of Roberto Miranda as the cultured middle-aged physician in a light summer suit, a picture of innocence, trying to suppress increasing panic while under attack. In a clear voice, attempting a rational medical discourse in the midst of this unleashed female frenzy, he tells Escobar, "Obviously, she's insane, she's not responsible for what she does, but you're a lawyer, if you don't stop this right now you're an accomplice, you're gonna have to pay the price." A highly educated and professional man is addressing himself to one of his kind. An assumed and required male association between Miranda and Escobar is asserted by the positioning of both men in a single frame, with Paulina outside of it. We are thus reminded of the previous evening's bonding between Escobar and Miranda, and of Miranda's quoting Nietzsche's dictum ("I think it was Nietzsche," he says) on the irreconcilable female difference: "We can never entirely possess a female soul."

frame #1

frame #2



frame #3

Miranda's head is in the right lower corner of the frame. His face is turned toward Escobar, who stands farther away to the left. Escobar makes some desperate gestures, signaling his own impotence and shock at what is happening (frame #1). But before he has the chance to actually say anything and affirm the connection between the two rational male beings trapped by a delusional woman, a gun enters the frame from the left side. In the first few moments, we do not see Paulina's head, only the gun and the hand which holds it, a gun which comes to rest on Miranda's chin. The expression on his face changes from assertiveness and self-righteousness to fear, and he immediately stops talking (frame #2). Then Paulina moves into the frame, positioning her head close to his, and we see the close-up of Paulina's head on the left and Miranda's on the right, with Escobar standing farther away and in the middle of the frame (frame #3). With the two men silent, Paulina says, "You threatening? . . . Let me make this clear. The time for people like you making threats is over. Ha? Out there maybe you bastards are still running things behind the scenes but in here, in *here*, I'm in charge. Understand? Me! Is that clear?"

The Victim's Space

"Outside"—where we, the spectators, are also placed—the rules of factuality, proofs, legality, medical discourse, and rationality hold power. Paulina has no proof that Miranda is the person who tortured her. As far as the legal discourse goes, she is the unreliable witness who would be "torn to pieces by any court"; in the medical assessment, she is delusional and obviously insane. In order to believe Paulina, we need to suspend all these rules of fact, logic, and other established discourses of truth. We need to enter Paulina's space, a space where she is in charge and where different rules apply.

The night is stormy and the electricity and telephone are cut off, thereby severing all connections with the outside world. The candlelight emphasizes the difference of this female space. Electricity and its even light can be seen as attributes of *logos*—a term which means mind, word, light, and can also be interpreted as an attribute of "masculine cerebrality."[2] Paulina asserts a female space that is based on and oriented toward the body and its truths: the givens of rape and torture, the inability to conceive a child, the body's memory of smell, touch, and sound, the exclu-

sion of the sense of sight privileged in a *logos*-centric discourse. As viewers, we need to accept the possibility of the body's truth, which turns the rational truth—of argument, facts, proofs, legality, medical science—into one big lie.

In order to fully participate in Paulina's different space, a space where "she's in charge," we also need to be aware of how politics are aestheticized or, in other words, of the fact that torturers might seem civil, innocent, and utterly believable, whereas victims often look crazy, unreliable, and ugly. Kingsley's Roberto Miranda is genuinely likable, and could easily be the convincingly innocent victim of a deranged woman. On the other hand, Polanski's Paulina is more physical, brutal, and sensual, as well as less verbal, than Dorfman's character, and Sigourney Weaver's performance managed to bring these aspects out in being "persuasively febrile." She is physically commanding (her performance in the *Alien* series resonates here): lean, muscular, and tall, with movements that are economic and precise but never (even before Dr. Miranda's arrival) graceful or beautiful. Weaver's Paulina can convincingly beat her captive into unconsciousness or push his car off the cliff—and thus look completely demented to those outside viewers who at that point in the film have no inkling of her possible motivations. She curses, beats up her captive, sniffs him, bites, and uses teeth instead of scissors. She holds Miranda's penis while he urinates with his hands tied behind his back. She is much "uglier" and less feminine (or not feminine at all) than in Dorfman's play.

By transforming Paulina's character in this way, Polanski's film sharpens the contrast between a woman who seems irrational and unreliable in her accusations, and her victim, who seems utterly innocent. There are convincing reasons for us—like Paulina's husband—to think that she is ill. Paulina can prove that she is right only if she can change our conventionally accepted parameters of what the truth is based on and what it is supposed to look like.

She Must Have a Gun: Violence and Truth

By holding Miranda and her husband hostage with her gun, Paulina manages to stage a situation that tricks Miranda into disclosing his intimate knowledge of the details of her torture. She succeeds in revealing his lies at the level of rational and factual discourse, and thus makes them visible even to her husband. But in order to be able to set her trap and "drag" Miranda into the open, to a space of factual proof which speaks to her husband (and to us), Paulina needs to have time and power, which she can obtain only with the help of her gun.

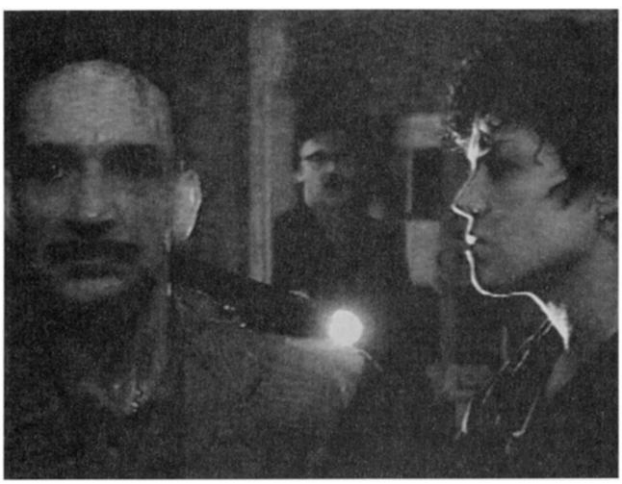
Throughout the night, Paulina never lets the weapon out of her hand (except for a moment of crisis when Miranda manages to take it away from her for a few seconds), and early on proves to Gerardo that she is absolutely serious about using it—firing at him when he starts to untie Miranda. When he pleads with her, "Give me the gun . . . listen, while you're holding the gun we have nothing to discuss," Paulina corrects him, saying, "On the contrary, the minute I give up the gun all discussion will end."

Polanski visually emphasizes the opposition between the legalistic, rational discourse advocated by Escobar and Paulina's method of getting the truth through the use of power. In many scenes, Escobar and Paulina occupy opposite sides of the screen, with the tied-up Miranda in the middle. We see, for instance, Escobar in the left corner, turned towards Paulina, who is standing farther away, diagonally across Escobar on the right side, and holding her gun. Miranda sits between them, like a prize for the winner. Across this space, Escobar delivers his talk and his persuasion, while Paulina points her gun at both men (frame #4). Rationality flows from Escobar to Paulina, who fights back with the power residing in her pointed gun.

frame #4

Another of the many striking examples of the visual accentuation of this weapon occurs when Paulina escorts Miranda to the bathroom. His hands

are tied, so she unties his zipper and holds his penis above the toilet with her left hand. With her right hand, she holds the gun pressed to Miranda's neck. The frame contains a close-up of Miranda's face on the left, Paulina's on the right, the gun between them, and then, in a medium shot, Escobar farther away, positioned right behind the centered gun, with his flashlight pointing at and emphasizing it (frame #5).



frame #5

Polanski radically changes Dorfman's stage directions for Paulina's firing of the shot at her husband. In Dorfman's directions, it is "clear that [Paulina] does not know how to fire the weapon, because she is as surprised as both men are, recoiling from the shot."[3] Polanski's Paulina, on the contrary, is in complete control, obviously knows how to use the gun, and does so deliberately. The gun is the site of Paulina's power, and if she is to use her power efficiently, she needs to know how to use her gun well. Unlike Dorfman's character, Polanski's Paulina does not allow her husband to embrace her and render her weapon ineffectual. When Escobar approaches her with the intention of comforting her, she points the gun at him and says, "I can't trust you." She opts for the gun and not for the husband. Sigourney Weaver portrays Paulina as a woman who, although shaken to the quick by Miranda's unexpected presence, repeatedly manages to get control over the situation—and herself—by literally drawing strength from her weapon.

In repeatedly emphasizing the crucial importance of the gun, Polanski's film underscores the necessity of power in obtaining the truth. Thus, this film leaves us puzzled and shaken. We surely do not want to relinquish the values of uncoerced investigation, rational discourse, and factual argumentation. However, as we become increasingly aware that Paulina might indeed be right, we also increasingly see "the law" (Escobar) as gullible, helplessly tied to the existing factuality, and affected by appearances (Paulina looks "ill," whereas "Miranda looks like someone we can trust"). Although he is an official voice for Paulina, Escobar, left to his own devices, could never find the truth. She repeatedly addresses him as "my boy" or "my baby, my poor gentle baby." Weaver infuses this line with the gentleness and cynicism of a woman who, though in love, is perfectly aware of her own superiority over her husband. As the voice of the Law, Stuart Wilson masterfully develops his role of a man who is always too slow, alternately expressing astonishment, utter disbelief, confusion, and finally understanding. When the astonished Miranda says, "He didn't do anything! He just stood there!," referring to Escobar's failure to seize the gun which Paulina had momentarily lost, Paulina answers, "Of course 'he just stood there.' He's the Law!"

Escobar/the Law cannot follow or be a match for Paulina and Miranda as they do battle in the sphere of violence, darkness, Eros, and death, a sphere inaccessible to Escobar and his knowledge. Paulina has no choice but to use the illegitimate and reprehensive power of the gun in order to descend into this sphere. Only by using the gun (the "unacceptable" power) can she bring Miranda "out" into the different space of light (factuality, rationality), where his demonic side will become visible to Escobar—and also to us. Miranda's final confession—which a kneeling Ben Kingsley delivers with a face and voice so very different from his previous Good Samaritan that it creates the stunning impression of removing a mask—could not have been gotten in any other way.

The "Death and the Maiden" motif in Polanski's movies can also be seen as one of a woman holding a deadly weapon. Polanski's films obsessively rework the motif of a woman-victim seizing power, a tool of death, and then deploying it in different ways. In *Repulsion*, Carol turns from a victim into victimizer by appropriating and later using one man's razor to kill another man. At the end of *Chinatown*, Evelyn Mulwray manages to escape the deadly embrace of her father, a rapist and murderer, by shooting and wounding him (only to end up being killed herself by the Los Angeles police). In *Bitter Moon*, a woman (played by Emmanuelle Seigner, Polanski's wife) gives a gun to her paralyzed lover, thereby returning to him the masculinity and power which she took away when she crippled him. She cannot and does not want

to escape a self-destructive cycle of eroticism as death. At the end of their voyage, her paralyzed lover uses this gun to kill her and then himself.

It seems that Polanski finds a productive solution for the motive of a woman-victim who seizes power (a weapon) in *Death and the Maiden*. Paulina uses a gun to get a confession, and when she gets it, she does not kill Miranda, nor is she herself killed. Instead, she puts the gun away—for the first time that night; she stashes it in her skirt, turns her back to Miranda standing at the edge of the cliff, and walks away. She employs the gun to prove the truth. Power is not used for retaliation and murder, which destroy not only the object of violence but also the one who violates; nor is power used inefficiently. Paulina uses her power to open a space that changes both her husband's and the spectators' notions of truthfulness, insanity, justice, and the role of power in revealing the truth.

I began this argument by linking the war in the former Yugoslavia to *Death and the Maiden*, finding the position of the outside viewer similar in both—a non-omniscient viewer, one who is required to make an ethical judgment and decide who is telling the truth and who is lying, who is the victim and who the villain. Without trying to reduce the multiple implications of this film, or forget that Paulina's struggle for the truth does not literally correspond to those that transpired with regard to the war in the former Yugoslavia, perhaps I can end by pointing out another analogy between that war and the film's assertion of the role of power in revealing the truth. In the Balkans, withholding "the gun" from the victims early on (through the arms embargo on Bosnia) prevented them not only from saving their lives, but also from representing the truth of what was being done to them. Had they not been so powerless and defenseless, their truth would have been supported by power which would have had to be listened to and considered. As it was, they were explaining, shouting, begging, urging. . . . But unarmed people do not have to be heeded, and their truth does not have to be accepted. Similarly, Paulina's truth would not have been accepted had she been without her gun. She would plead with Escobar, be left to his inadequacies, and watch impotently as polite Miranda takes his leave.

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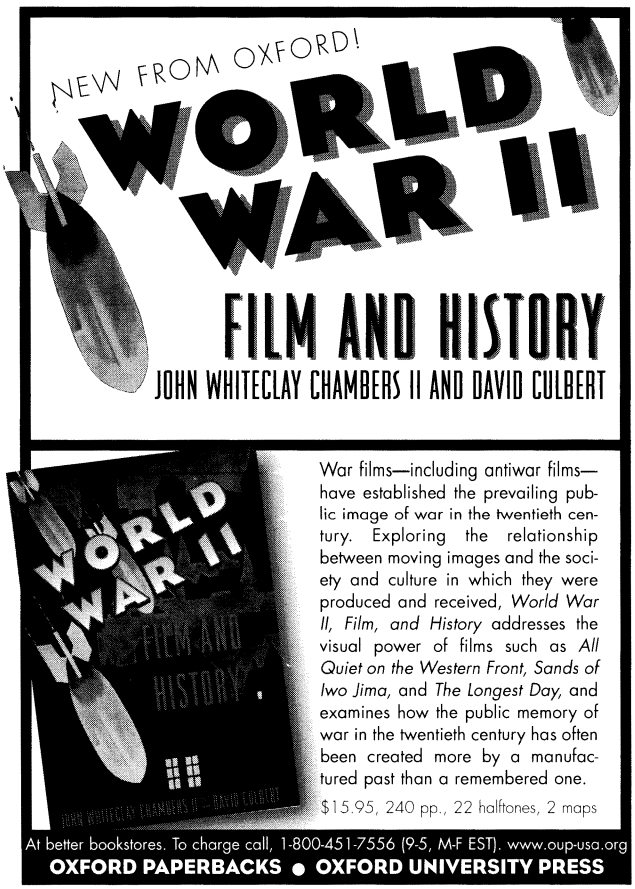
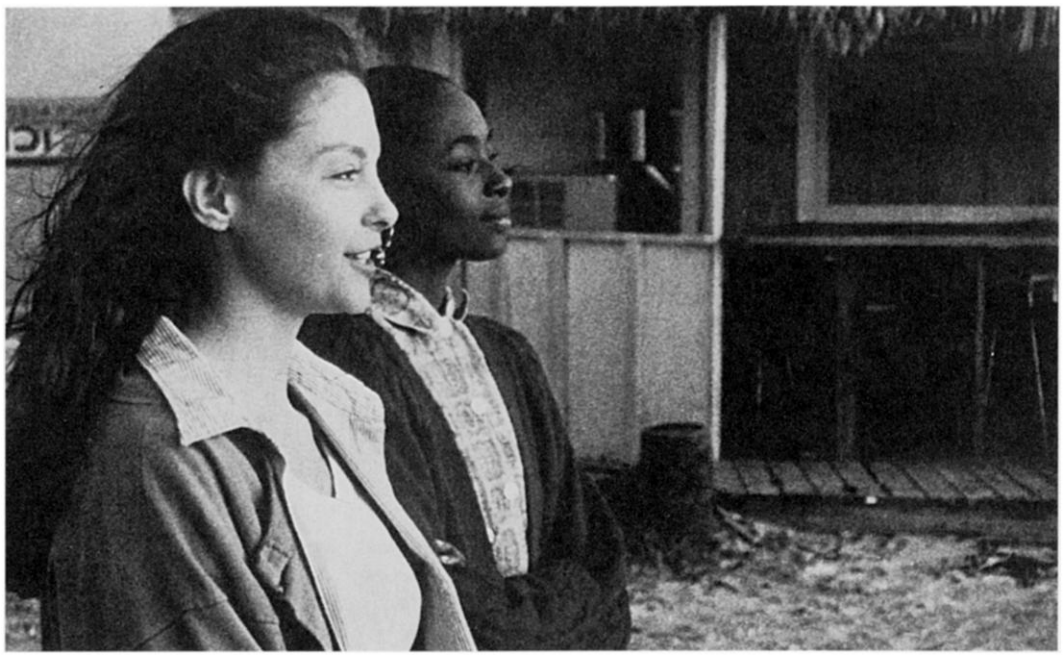


On page 27 of this issue, you will have noticed Martha Nochimson's insightful piece on soap opera. Over the many years of its existence, Film Quarterly*—as the name suggests—has concentrated primarily on film studies. But things change, and although the name remains the same, we want to make clear that television and video are both areas of interest for this journal. We welcome submissions covering topics and issues in those fields of study.* A.M.

1. Lawrence Weschler, "Artist in Exile," in *The New Yorker*, 5 December, 1994, p. 90.
2. I am drawing here on Luce Irigaray's equation of the Idea (Plato's Sun, perfect light, rationality) with the masculine element, in opposition to the feminine element of earth, body, or (in Plato's terms) dark cave. See section "Plato's *Hystera*," in Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985). Paulina dismantles the rationality of light and the accepted logical terms, and instead establishes the "dark" zone of a different, "feminine" truth.
3. Ariel Dorfman, *Death and the Maiden*, trans. Dorfman (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p.21.



Ashley Judd as Ruby (left) and Allison Dean as Rochelle

Ruby in Paradise

Writer/director/editor: Victor Nunez. Producer: Keith Crofford. Cinematographer: Alex Vlacos. Music: Charlie Engstrom. October Films.

Last year Jane Austen seemed to fill every screen. We had film or TV adaptations of *Emma*, *Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, with more reportedly on the way. Yet the recent Janeite revival was anticipated by a box-office sleeper that borrowed from Austen far more imaginatively than any of its successors: Victor Nunez's *Ruby in Paradise*. With roots in *Northanger Abbey*, *Ruby* took top honors at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival, went on to rave reviews, and then dropped out of sight.

It's not hard to guess why: unlike the other Austen makeovers, *Ruby* projects a deeply disquieting vision. There's plenty to irk viewers in *Persuasion*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*; all the offense, however, is set in the picturesque English past. *Emma*-inspired *Clueless*, on the other hand, is a veritable catalog of contemporary American decadence; but its laser-sharp portraits of an appallingly "clueless" society are hard to take either personally or seriously, given the film's wealthy characters and burlesque style.

Ruby in Paradise offers few such distractions. The time is now, the society is familiar, and the tone is sober. *Ruby* surveys the havoc of late-20th-century American life and asks: What sort of integrity is possible here? Today, that question—worthy of Jane Austen—is rarely answered without resorting to cynicism or nostalgia. Austen-like, this smart, graceful movie avoids both temptations. Along the way, eschewing old clichés about freedom and new ones about sisterhood, it makes one of the most nuanced feminist statements of any film in recent memory. Available on video, *Ruby in Paradise* deserves a closer look.

Ruby openly acknowledges its debt to *Northanger Abbey* when its heroine, Ruby Lee Gissing (played by Ashley Judd, luminous in her major screen debut), picks up a friend's copy of the novel and reads the first lines aloud:

> No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and her own disposition, were all equally against her.

"Those are *my* odds!" Ruby exclaims. She's wrong: her odds are even worse. The accuracy of that judgment depends of course on what you mean by "an heroine."

Austen meant the female paragons who frequented the popular fiction of her day. The sentimental and Gothic novels that were all the rage in Georgian England featured young women who were impossibly beautiful, virtuous, cultured, and fortu-

nate—ingenues who spoke several languages flawlessly, played the piano and the harp with ease, and withstood fearsome perils without ever once compromising their virtue or losing their composure. Austen found such creatures absurdly un-"natural"; Catherine Morland, the heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, would be a corrective.

Handicapped by undistinguished parentage, limited means, meager accomplishments, and looks that are only "almost pretty," Catherine is an eager but unremarkable young woman who, for all her ordinariness, still finds her way in the world. In *Northanger Abbey* the world is represented by the promiscuous society of Bath, then England's premier resort; and the novel begins with the 17-year-old Catherine's maiden journey from her home in a Wiltshire village to the popular spa. Finding her way means learning whom to trust and how to act on her convictions—a crucial assignment for the unwed daughters of the financially pressed small gentry, and for the gullible Catherine, a particularly hard lesson.

Ruby in Paradise relocates the Catherine Morland story to modern America. The film's first shot pans across the rear of a beat-up Chevelle bearing a Tennessee license plate. In the next frame the same car is slowly moving down a darkening highway. The camera closes in on the face of the intent young woman at the wheel and then, in a series of rapid flashbacks, glimpses what she's just left behind: a steepled church in a mean Appalachian village; an angry man rushing out of a small wooden house and hurling his boot in the wake of her departing car; and finally, the road itself, its double yellow dividing line rushing into the past.

Once again, a country-bred ingenue travels from her backwater home to a popular watering place—a move that, like Catherine Morland's trip to Bath, signifies "entrée into life" and heralds daunting challenges to the heroine's morale and morality. Ruby Gissing's destination is northern Florida, a locale that Victor Nunez knows well, as he demonstrated in *A Flash of Green* (1979) and *Gal Young 'Un* (1984). Ruby is bound for Panama City—the "Redneck Riviera," according to one sweatshirt—the Gulf Coast town that she visited with her family when she was ten, "on the only vacation that I can remember." Now, a decade or so later, she's on a mission, not a holiday, looking for much the same thing as Catherine Morland seeks in Bath: a place in the world, and not just any place. To get there, she too must undergo a difficult education. Ruby asks her new girlfriend Rochelle (Allison Dean), a college student at the local state university, "What would you teach—children, I mean?" Rochelle, who is about Ruby's age and black, doesn't hesitate: "How to survive—with your soul intact." "Yes," says Ruby, "I guess that's it." To master that curriculum, Ruby must overcome all Catherine's disadvantages and yet another: she's on her own.

Modern readers tend to notice first how Austen's heroines are constrained by dense social ties. But Catherine's connections also smooth her way. She comes to Bath as the guest of the wife of the largest proprietor in her family's neighborhood. In a time when a respectable young unmarried woman required a chaperone, such a companion was indispensable. Catherine's hostess, Mrs. Allen, is a self-absorbed fool, but she has her uses: she not only conveys Catherine to Bath but takes her to dances and has Mr. Allen inquire into the character of Henry Tilney, the fetching young man who dances with Miss Morland one evening at the Pump Room.

No such help is available to Ruby Lee Gissing. She travels alone. Isolated and anonymous, she faces another challenge that never troubles Catherine Morland: she has to support herself. It's autumn—off-season in Panama City—and though work is scarce, Ruby talks herself into a job as a salesclerk at Chambers Beach Emporium, a gift shop catering to the tourist trade.

This is a Catherine Morland for the 1990s. But screenwriter-director Nunez didn't stop there. In a gesture that situated the unlikely heroine even more precisely in our time, he stripped Ruby of Catherine's most elementary social resource: a good family or, for that matter, any family at all. Of a father or siblings, there's not a word. Ruby remembers her mother as a bulwark—"After Mother passed," she tells Rochelle, "everything went bad all around"—and as a dupe and a defender of fundamentalist religious belief. "It was all a bloody mean trick," she says, one that turned on "guilt and shame." She's determined not to be taken in again—by anything or anyone. In the diary she begins in Panama City, Ruby writes that at home "it was do this, do that. Now it's up to me."

If Catherine never utters such a sentiment, it's partly because Austen has provided her with good parents whose child-rearing partakes equally of common sense, latitude, and affection. Catherine knows that no matter what happens, she can always go home. And home she goes, after Henry Tilney's despotic father rudely turns her out of Northanger Abbey.

In *Ruby*'s America, the domestic sanctuary has vanished. None of the other young people Ruby meets

in Panama City mentions a father; mothers are absent, irrelevant, or inept; and everyone appears to be an only child. With adult authority and family life in disrepair, the young have to fend for themselves. Differently stated, Ruby is free—unaided but also unencumbered by relatives and relations. Nunez exposes the illusions of such freedom, the freedom of classic liberal society: thus liberated, individuals are stranded and vulnerable.

Young women are especially vulnerable to unscrupulous men. Both heroines attract a dangerous cad. In *Northanger Abbey*, John Thorpe's "endless conceit" roils Catherine from the start; but because he is the brother of a girlfriend and the schoolmate of her own brother James, she initially puts up with him. After two provoking rides in his carriage, she finally musters the wherewithal to decline his invitations—a step that, for the callow heroine, constitutes an unprecedented act of self-possession. But Catherine's resistance jeopardizes her future, as Thorpe avenges the rebuff by maligning her family to the vain and overbearing General Tilney. The result is her untimely eviction from Northanger Abbey and the suspension of her hopes of marriage to the general's son.

In contrast to the virginal Catherine, Ruby, a "natural" woman of the late twentieth century, is sexually knowing. She's also no pushover: "I got out of Manning," she tells Rochelle, "without getting pregnant or beat up—that's saying something." Nevertheless, Ruby's dealings with men lead to an even more harrowing predicament than the one that overtakes her sheltered literary ancestor.

In the film, John Thorpe's place is taken by Ricky Chambers (Bentley Mitchum), another manipulative braggart and the spoiled 20-something son of Ruby's boss Mildred. Ricky's mother, an attractively weathered 40-ish blond (Dorothy Lyman), has declared him off-limits to her employees. Rochelle, Ruby's part-time colleague at Chambers, warns that he's "slime" who will "come on to you sooner or later"—a prediction that is promptly confirmed. Importuning Ruby with a bully's canny precision, Ricky jeers, "I can take care of myself. Can you?" At first she resists; the guy is forbidden and—of greater consequence—obnoxious. Then vanity (she'll show him) overwhelms discretion, and she twice agrees to a date. Their wordless, sexually intense encounters leave him, to his surprise, wanting more and her realizing she's made a mistake. When he presses her for another date, she tells him, "I didn't come all this way to be your chippy."

But Ricky won't be put off so easily. One night he shows up drunk and angry at Ruby's cottage and tries to rape her. After a terrifying struggle and the timely return of neighbors, she manages to escape. Just before he leaves, though, Ricky delivers a final blow: he tells her she's fired.

"Nothing good comes of being a fool," writes Ruby in her journal. In the present era of victimage, it is worth noting that this heroine is clearly implicated in her plight. Ruby's susceptibility to Ricky's wiles helps plunge her into difficulties far worse than the ones confronting Catherine Morland: Catherine has lost the promise of security and happiness; Ruby stands on the brink of destitution.

The film's resolution of this crisis conspicuously departs from Austen's plot. In *Northanger Abbey*, the hero saves the day. Defying his father, Henry Tilney rushes to the Morland home and makes Catherine a proposal of marriage, which she accepts with alacrity. In Ruby's case, such a dénouement is impossible, though not because she lacks the marital option, or at least a passable equivalent. Though Ricky Chambers finds her home alone, by the time of his nasty call Ruby has a new and more plausible man in her life.

Her second suitor is Mike McCaslin (Todd Field), a young nurseryman she meets while she is buying a houseplant. Like Henry Tilney, Mike McCaslin has "a very intelligent and lively eye" and is, "if not quite handsome," then "very near it." As Mike affably informs Ruby, he is "a nice guy." He has steady, prideful work. He is gentle, patient—and sexy. He lives in a roomy cottage filled with comfortable old furniture, handsome quilts, soft light, and lots of books. He can cook (Ruby can't). In the morning he sits on the deck overlooking a pond and plays Liszt on his trombone. He is even ready to make a commitment—the contemporary version of Henry Tilney's marriage offer.

But where Henry succeeds in his suit, Mike fails. That's because life with "a nice guy"—the indispensable confirmation of Catherine Morland's success—is peripheral to Ruby Gissing's enterprise. Ruby wonders why she didn't deter Ricky Chambers by telling him that she had a new boyfriend. "Maybe," she muses, "I didn't want that to mark me: Hands off. I'm some other man's lady." On the face of it, her independent stance seems radically opposed to Catherine's demure solicitation of Henry Tilney. But Ruby is faithful to the spirit, if not to the letter, of Catherine's venture. For Catherine, who has no better alternative, marriage to a decent man is a sensible goal. Considering the state of family and marriage depicted in the film, Ruby's wish to maintain unmarked by her asso-

ciations with men may be as prudent a desire as Catherine's wish to be a wife.

Ruby seeks more than independence, however; she craves out-and-out respect—an item that is not on Catherine Morland's wish list. Indeed, engaging Henry Tilney requires Catherine to accommodate his disdain for female intellect, a disdain mixed with the nicest sort of praise. "No one," says Henry, "can think more highly of the understanding of women than I do. In my opinion, nature has given them so much, that they never find it necessary to use more than half."

Henry is being clever, but Austen let ostensibly half-witted womanhood have the last word. "Where people wish to attach," she wrote, "they should always be ignorant."

> To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others, which a sensible person would always wish to avoid. A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.

In this respect Catherine Morland has little to hide, a condition of which she is, however, "heartily ashamed." Her mortification, the narrator comments, is itself naïve: Catherine "did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward." And here Catherine does not fail.

Given Henry Tilney's quasi-feminist rhetoric, we might expect him to prefer a lively bluestocking. Instead, he is utterly charmed by the untutored Miss Morland, who eagerly solicits his opinions about literature, landscape, and what a later age calls gender relations. In the end, we are assured, Henry "delighted in all the excellencies of [Catherine's] character." The truth, however, is that "the only cause of his giving her a serious thought" in the first place "had been . . . a persuasion of her partiality for him."

In Austen's day, the recommendation that women who "wish to attach" had better hide their wits was practical, if noticeably unromantic, advice. The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* admits that the text's account of Henry's interest in Catherine is "dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity," but contends that the tale mirrors "common life." Nearly 200 years later, that contention may still hold true.

Say, then, that *Ruby*'s heroine will not resign herself to the common female lot. She wants to be noticed for her own "excellencies" and not merely for "administering to the vanity of others" or for having received the perquisites that often reward such services. That sort of recognition, she soon discovers, is not to be readily had from Mike McCaslin.

For despite his unassuming job and his casual style—jeans, motorcycle, old leather jacket—Mike is a snob, a patrician by temperament and, in a quirky American way, by birth. Descended from the first white men to settle Panama City, he takes a proprietary interest in the local environment and its past. Ruby writes in her journal: "He knows about how the Indians lived and where the Spanish first landed" and "how things started going wrong almost from the start." In Mike's view, things are still going wrong—in a big way. He takes Ruby to see the old bridge where he and his grandfather used to fish, then points to a big ugly span that's under construction. "Ain't nobody," he says (evoking the Faulkner protagonist with whom, less one letter, he shares a name), "goin' to be fishing" off this one. Once he worked to make things better, but now he regards environmentalism as a lost cause. His present task is to practice "low-impact living" and to "[keep] the record straight."

Mike invites Ruby into his world. He lends her books—it's his copy of *Northanger Abbey* that she peruses—and solicits her opinions about what she's read. At the same time, he disparages her judgment. Over Ruby's objections, he insists that they walk out on an action film that he deems "crap." When she looks out over the Gulf and murmurs, "No matter how much they mess things up, there's always that ocean," he shrugs: "Polluted and dying. There it is." He belittles her job as a mere "selling game." "It can't mean anything," he asserts. "It can't be the reason you're here." If she wants to find out the real reason, her best bet, in his opinion, is to let him show the way: "You just need a guy to aim you in the right direction."

That advice grates on Ruby, whose main project is figuring out how to steer by her own compass. When she articulates that desire in her journal, she displays a feminist sensibility; openly protesting Mike's condescension, she affirms a more inclusive ideal. "People have to make up their own minds!" she retorts, after he's blasted shoot-'em-up movies. At the end of their big fight, she implores him to "please stop looking down at the rest of us!" She speaks for those who lack the roots to sustain a sense of history, the intellectual capacity or training to relish high culture, the luck to have found work they love and respect—for the rubes, as it were.

That position has no counterpart in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen disparaged pretension, but she was no

democrat. She recognized an aristocracy of virtue whose members' display of "real taste"—as her narrator terms the cultural acumen exhibited by Henry Tilney—merited deference. By Austen's criteria, Ruby, ill-informed and utterly undeferential, is simply impudent.

In designating Mike McCaslin as Ruby's foil, Nunez made it hard to dismiss her complaints. When Mike objects that her job is just "a selling game," she counters: "It's a game whose rules I understand. For awhile, that's just going to have to be enough. It's better than having no game at all." It's this last, daunting possibility—"having no game at all"—that sets the standard. From Ruby's vantage, her job at Chambers, however banal (or worse) it may seem to the Mike McCaslins of the world, is the only opportunity she can presently grasp. Mike can afford to scorn the market; she can't. And until he can point out a viable alternative—moving in with him doesn't count—his strictures will sound to her like so much "gloom-and-doom crap."

Envisioned by its author as an antiromantic work, *Northanger Abbey* has a conventionally romantic finale: "Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang and every body smiled." For a moment, *Ruby in Paradise* seems headed for its own smiling conclusion: Mike says he's sorry, Ruby forgives him, and they embrace. To an audience brought up on Hollywood endings (or the novels of Jane Austen), it's a seductive moment. But with the camera still fixed on the sweet conciliatory hug, Ruby says, in a voiceover: "That's when I started seeing less of Mike." Resolutely unsentimental, this plot leaves its heroine unattached. It does not, however, leave her alone, and it is Ruby's lasting associations—with other women—that point up the saving moral of her story.

It's a moral she has yet to learn when Ricky puts her out on the street. At that point, proud to a fault, she's still determined to make it on her own. Having concealed her liaison with Ricky, she lies to Rochelle about why she's left Chambers, letting Mildred take the blame; avoids Mike; and looks for another job. In the dead of winter, the only thing she can find is work in a huge laundry. The hours are long, the pay is low, and the labor is killing. A kindly co-worker is named Persefina: the place is a hell. Outside the air has turned icy. At night, exhausted and alone, she huddles in a blanket and dreams of hope.

Help arrives at last, in an unexpected form. One evening Mildred Chambers appears at her door. After telling Ruby that she won't be bothered again by Ricky, Mildred asks her to return as the assistant manager of the shop. The offer is accepted.

Ruby triumphs, on terms that Catherine Morland could not have imagined. Her success and her status as a representative heroine are credible only in a society in which women look to the market rather than to the family for sustenance. The film makes brutally clear the costs of that shift and the suffering it entails. But it also presents the workplace outside the home as the context of social relations that enable women to survive. While the men either recoil from the market (Mike) or embody its worst qualities (Ricky), the women grapple with its merciless impersonality.

Ruby's deliverance turns partly on her newfound readiness to rely on other women. While still at the laundry, she admits to Rochelle the real reason that she left Chambers Beach Emporium. Without telling Ruby, Rochelle shares that confidence with Mildred, who then asks Ruby to come back to work.

As befits the realism of the tale, the goodwill of Ruby's women colleagues has nothing to do with any innate female aptitude for compassion. Rather, the critical dispensations involve hard choices and considerable hazards: Mildred has to admit her failure as a mother; Rochelle has to risk losing her job. What enables each of them to rise to the occasion is the clear-eyed recognition that Ruby's predicament is in essential respects hers as well.

For Mildred Chambers, that identification begins when Ruby comes looking for a job. Months later, on her penitential visit, Mildred explains why, in a slow season, she took Ruby on: "You were hungry. There was a rage and a fury that I recognized from a long time ago." The impression of common history extends to dealings with men. Her son, Mildred tells Ruby, is just like his "long-forgotten ass of a father." Well before Rochelle's call, she's realized that Ricky has been exploiting her financially, and that she's allowed him to exploit her emotionally as well. For Mildred to credit Rochelle's account of Ruby's disappearance, rather than Ricky's, means that maternal folly has been superseded by hard-won insight.

Rochelle also identifies with Ruby's struggles. Another college student working a part-time job might snub Ruby Lee Gissing, but Rochelle regards her as a comrade-in-arms. This matter-of-fact egalitarianism may have something to do with Rochelle's race and class. Surely it has to do with her sex. She warns her shopmate not to get involved with Ricky; she sees Ruby through hard times by lending her money; and she risks her own job by revealing to

Mildred how Ricky has manipulated her and Ruby both, and why. Like the redeeming comrades of color in classic American literature, Rochelle is as brave as her white pal, and wiser. Having set the moral agenda for the heroine, she helps her live up to it.

Ruby comes through, thanks to Rochelle's generosity, Mildred's integrity, and her own grit. But survival comprises only one half of her curriculum; the other concerns the state of her "soul."

Victor Nunez took more from *Northanger Abbey* than an idea for a heroine and the rudiments of a plot. He also adopted the novel's preoccupation with the way cultural conventions shape, and misshape, our sense of possibility. The book keeps that interest close to the surface through the narrator's sardonic running commentary on the enticing excesses of romantic fiction. In subtler and more penetrating fashion, *Ruby in Paradise* also heeds signs of romance and their problematic allure.

That powerful attraction is marked in the film's opening frames. After introducing the wayfaring heroine, the camera shifts to the dusky highway ahead. Out of the lowering night, the reflective letters of a road sign loom into view. The Chevelle's headlights illuminate their message: "Welcome to Florida. The Sunshine State." That greeting advertises the true romance of Ruby's—and America's—life.

On any road map, Florida lies south of Tennessee; but according to the charts of American myth, Ruby's gone West—headed for the place of opportunity, a site linked in her imagination to nature. Not incidentally, Panama City faces west across the Gulf of Mexico. Soon after her arrival, Ruby makes the first of many pilgrimages down to the beach. The sun is just setting as she dips her hand into the glimmering surf and, gazing out over the waves, reverently tastes the salt water on her fingers. As she says later to Mike: "No matter how they mess things up, there's always that ocean."

A protagonist who forsakes a dead-end life in the settlements and thrills to inviolate nature brings to mind the heroes of classic American romance and its popular descendant, the Western. Like Thelma and Louise, Ruby flees the chauvinism of the small-town South. But her romantic impulses, unlike theirs, are projected in a realistic mode: her view of the water is always taken from a point within culture, a culture that, the film keeps reminding us, has despoiled the natural world.

Tacitly substantiating Mike McCaslin's outlook, a pitiless camera surveys Panama City and discovers run-down motels, fast-food franchises, sleazy tourist traps, ugly high rises, and weedy lots littered with windblown trash. The soundtrack transmits the incessant din of machines—cash registers, cars, motorcycles, airplanes. Here nature has been mechanized and merchandised. One of the locals tells the newly arrived Ruby that she has "come out of step with the seasons," meaning the annual cycle of tourism, not the terrestrial turning of the year. The promise of the road sign is barely realized: through most of the film the sun shines dimly over Panama City when it shines at all.

Ruby realizes that the place is neither pure nor beautiful. What's striking, then, is that she still pays tribute to an idealized redemptive nature. At a trade fair in Tampa, Mildred Chambers asks her to pick out something for the store; Ruby chooses a set of plastic plates decorated with silhouetted couples, colored photos of palm trees, and the logo "Paradise." Her earnest choice evokes ironies built to the same scale as those that inform the deceptively modest careers of Jane Austen's heroines. "Isn't it wonderful," Mike says to Ruby, "the way Austen seems to dwell on the superficial and the comic and yet all the while revealing the contradictions and value systems of an entire society?" She doesn't quite understand what he's saying, but, her story indicates, Nunez does. In her final journal entry, Ruby writes: "I suppose it means more, making it in some big great city somewhere, but this is the world I found, and I guess the questions stay the same." The film's parting shot discreetly reminds its viewers that that world and those questions are theirs as well.

As the final credits roll to an end, a picture we've seen before fades into view. We're back on the dark highway that Ruby traveled to Panama City. Once again that sign materializes on the side of the road: "Welcome to Florida. The Sunshine State." Earlier, the audience read those words over the heroine's shoulder. Now Ruby has disappeared, and the camera has put the viewer in her place. Now we too are driving in the dark, trying to make out poorly lit signs on unfamiliar roads. This time, however, we can call upon an interpretive resource that was not available at the start: the story we've just witnessed. Vanished from the screen, Ruby and her tale linger in our mind's eye, perhaps changing the way we read the words reflected through the night.

ZELDA BRONSTEIN

■ Zelda Bronstein is a writer and independent radio producer in Berkeley.

Book Reviews

Cinematic Landscapes

Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan

Edited by Linda C. Ehrlich and David Desser. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994. $55.00 cloth; $19.95 paper.

Ever since Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie's seminal *The Japanese Film* (1959), film critics have regarded the traditional arts as illuminating analogues to (or influences on) Asian film techniques. *Cinematic Landscapes* updates this interpretive move with 14 fascinating new essays from an international array of prominent or promising critics who argue that some of China and Japan's most significant films, in the words of editors Linda C. Ehrlich and David Desser, "cite the visual arts as a reference point or as a relevant basis for comparison."

Ehrlich and Desser's introduction concisely sets forth the theoretical stakes of their volume. Traditional Asian landscape painting (particularly the influential, Chinese Ming Dynasty-era Southern school) has often eschewed the illusion of depth so dear to Western realist painting, utilizing entirely different techniques for representing space: "multiple perspectives, relative flatness, use of blank spaces, elastic framing, lack of chiaroscuro and sculptural shading," as Douglas Wilkerson itemizes them in his enlightening introduction to the section on Chinese cinema. For Ehrlich and Desser, these alternatives to Western practices, reproduced in film-making, suggest that the ideological meanings of a film's rendering of space stem more from stylistic traditions than from camera and lens technology (as apparatus theory argues). While *Cinematic Landscapes* is not a theoretical book, its astute essays often evoke such broader considerations.

The penchant for placing the human figure in an overwhelming landscape becomes the keynote of many of the analyses that follow. For Hao Dazheng, this practice is a legacy of China's agricultural roots, with its necessary emphasis on communal values and the harmonious relationship between people and nature. Multiple and parallel depth perspectives in Chinese painting evoke a transcendence of the individual's importance, while the spiritual essence of objects is apprehended in shallow space. To Dazheng, these concepts and techniques inform the long-shot scales and long takes so prevalent in pre-1970s Chinese films.

Depending on the critic, the vast landscapes of Fifth Generation Chinese films can evoke different meanings and traditions. For An Jingfu of the Beijing Film Academy, Chen Kaige's *King of the Children* (1988) embodies Taoist's precepts of living in "emptiness, silence and purity" within nature. For Ni Zhen, screenwriter for Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992), the long shots and "empty screens" of Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) and Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* (1988) express not harmony, but the subordination of the individual to one's surroundings.

While some authors find abstract, philosophical ideas in particular cinematic techniques, others find more specific meanings, often in films informed by alternative painting traditions. Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar's fascinating essay identifies the 20th-century Chang'an school as a major influence on *Yellow Earth*, in which overwhelming vistas suggest, in conjunction with the rich yellow hues of the film's color scheme, a maternal quality that reworks conventions of socialist imagery. Similarly, Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, in her intelligent analysis of color and visual style in *Judou* (1989), focuses on Chinese portraiture, from which the film derives its "flat frontal wide shots" that reveal nuances of the characters' relationships.

The lengthier section of *Cinematic Landscapes* on Japanese cinema proves equally stimulating and rich in its insights. Noted critic Thomas Rimer notes how classical Japanese artists valued "the suggestive" and the portrayal of an object's "essence" (through the calculated handling of empty space), and hence solicited the viewer's contribution to complete an image. Donald Richie's article (partly a reworking of his "Viewing Japanese Film") argues that these principles apply to film as well.

Tadao Sato links Japanese cinema to traditional arts more concretely. Among other contributions, Sato helpfully itemizes iconography in Japanese arts—the symbolism of cherry blossoms (impermanence), snow (spiritual purity), cranes (longevity)—and notes their frequent appearance in major films. He reminds us that confessional scenes in Ozu's *A Hen in the Wind* (1948) and *Early Spring* (1956) draw upon the convention of using river banks as a locale for "expressing and confronting one's emotions."

Sato mentions that Mizoguchi compared his long-take, moving-camera style in films like *Chusingura* (1941–42) to *emaki* scroll painting. D. William Davis's essay develops the analogy, arguing convincingly that

this epic film tutored its wartime audience in spartan aesthetics through "visual cues that appropriate the perceptual experience" of *Yamato-e* painting (the extensive crane shots and long takes of meticulously arranged scenes) and *kare sansui* dry landscape gardens (the slow, stately camera moves in the palace courtyard where Lord Asano attacks Lord Kira).

Davis views Mizoguchi as a parametric director who instructs the viewer on "the austere pleasure of duration and its concomitant virtues of patience and discernment"; Dudley Andrew similarly finds Mizoguchi five years later, in *Utamaro and His Women* (1946), obsessed with artistic process itself, particularly in his depiction of women and in the film's endorsement of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints (which share many industrial, technological, and ideological traits with movies) over court painting.

Woodblock printing also figures in Linda Ehrlich's discussion of Kon Ichikawa's *An Actor's Revenge* (1963) and Kathe Geist's essay on Ozu. Ehrlich's piece links that film's outrageous parodic elements and gender-bending use of actor Kazuo Hasegawa in multiple roles to the Meiji-Taisho era "Creative Print" movement, a style that rejected both Japanese prints and Western oil painting by asserting the individuality of the artist through a formal playfulness. Geist explores Ozu's adoption of woodblock techniques in the look of the flattened space, grid backgrounds, and playful depth cues in his interior scenes, highlighting as well Ozu's use of "the view into deep space framed by objects in close up," a technique she documents by juxtaposing a shot from *End of Summer* (1961) with an Utagawa Hiroshige print.

Considerations of widescreen and color film-making round out the volume. Cynthia Contreras links the new aspect ratio to scroll painting and to the horizontality of Japanese stages and domestic space, and extends her observations to a keen and unprecedented discussion of Masao Kobayashi's visual style. Here, dynamic compositions and dominating diagonals enable the director to construct the claustrophobic settings in which rebellious samurai are trapped, as well as to evoke powerful forces and offscreen space in *Kwaidan* (1964) and *The Human Condition* (1959–61). By contrast, David Desser's perceptive essay explores how color was incorporated into the Japanese cinema's aesthetic design, as distinct from its narrative functions in Hollywood style. In *Ohayo* (1959) and *Dodeskaden* (1970), Ozu's realism and Kurosawa's expressionism both deploy color as a means of graphic patterning and generating humor. By contrast, Seijun Suzuki's "stylistically excessive" and "patently unrealistic" visual style (in films like 1964's *Gate of Flesh*) offers a third strategy, using color to explore film's formal potentials.

Whether addressing the works of pantheon directors or those of less familiar artists, the best essays in *Cinematic Landscapes* revel in the often neglected art of analyzing mise-en-scène and shot composition. The specific emphasis here on visual traditions provides a systematic and welcome complement to the usual focus on East Asian drama and literature (as in Noël Burch's *To the Distant Observer* [1979]). The fact that several essays emphasize different traditions even in discussing the same film—or that the authors here disagree on how one "reads" a landscape or on how to construe the connection between art and cinema—gives the volume a productive tone of exchange and debate. This is sustained at the most general level: *Cinematic Landscapes* encourages us to compare strategies in the films of both China and Japan (their shared predilection for what Wilkerson calls "attenuated" narratives and for a focus on "non-narrative space and time"). Yet we can also contrast them, following Sherman Lee's landmark 1962 essay (included here) that distinguishes between Chinese artists' tendency toward moderation and rationality and the Japanese penchant for exaggeration and intuition.

Moreover, Ehrlich and Desser have selected and arranged the articles with an intelligence and care that is becoming rare in film studies anthologies. And I salute the University of Texas Press for allowing the editors and authors a lavish number of illustrations so crucial to the arguments: production stills, frame enlargements, reproductions of woodblocks and of landscape paintings—13 in color! The result is an elegant volume whose luxury factor approaches the coffee-table book and whose superlative essays guarantee that the reader will not watch these films the same way again.

MATTHEW BERNSTEIN

■ Matthew Bernstein teaches Japanese cinema at Emory University.

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From Mouse to Mermaid

The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture

Edited by Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995. $39.95 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Over the last 20 years, animation has become a significant area of study for film scholars, but very few have followed up on Sybil Del Gaudio's important work on the manner in which cartoons construct gender. In this volume of 16 essays about Disney films, several pieces directly consider this issue in terms of representational strategies, and as a result begin the work of filling in a major gap in our understanding of animation. A problem with the volume, however, emerges from its relation to the body of scholarly work that deals broadly with Walt Disney. Most noticeably, it refuses to enter into conversation with a variety of film and cultural studies scholars—including Susan Willis, Donald Crafton, Julianne Burton-Carvajal, David Kunzle, Armand Mattelart, and Ariel Dorfman—who have turned Disney studies into an important area of interdisciplinary inquiry. (In the interest of full disclosure, I admit that one of my disappointments is that my own work on Disney is mentioned nowhere in the text.)

The editors' introduction highlights the collection's shortcomings, as Bell, Haas, and Sells begin by discussing their original plan for the title of the volume. They had hoped to call it *Doing Disney: Critical Dialogues in Film, Gender, and Culture*, but were discouraged by their correspondence with Disney. The company informed them that it "does not allow third-party books to use the name 'Disney' in their titles—this implies endorsement or sponsorship by the Disney organization" (1). Of course, Disney has no power to enforce this kind of across-the-board claim, but the editors, apparently unwilling to doubt the company's authority, decided to change the title. In so doing they not only cast doubt on the intellectual independence of the numerous Disney scholars who have invoked Walt's name in their book titles, but they also betray their own belief in Disney as a kind of monolith of oppression, a trope that turns up in many of the essays.

Because of this certainty about Disney, the editors cite Marc Elliot, who wrote the rather ridiculous biography *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*, as an authoritative source. The editors insist that the "biography reveals Disney's status as F.B.I. informant, a role that is not surprising considering Disney's long-standing relationship with the federal government" (5). Of course, even though two of the essays repeat this charge of Disney-as-F.B.I. mole, Disney scholars know that there is no evidence in his F.B.I. file that he clandestinely informed on anyone. Indeed, his relationship with the federal government in general, and with J. Edgar Hoover in particular, was an extremely vexed one. This is not to excuse Disney's far-right conservatism, his virulent antipathy to labor, his anti-Semitism, or his role in various projects of U.S.-sponsored cultural imperialism. It is instead to indicate that relations between corporate and governmental power are complex; in the case of Hoover and Disney, for instance, ideological twins worked in constant and rather delighted opposition to each other. But because their analysis of power tends toward a notion of unproblematic, unified hegemony, the editors (and many of the contributors) simply turn Disney into just another member of a pack of identical and very big bad wolves.

There are, however, at least three significant essays here. Two of them were written by scholars who have a continuing stake in Disney scholarship, Jack Zipes and Henry A. Giroux. In his essay, Zipes provides a useful history of fairy tales and folk tales and the manner in which Disney appropriated both. Giroux examines how Disney is "more than a logo; it signifies how the terrain of popular culture has become central to commodifying memory and rewriting narratives of national identity and global expansion" (46). He then analyzes *Good Morning, Vietnam*, released by Disney's Touchstone Pictures in 1987, and demonstrates the manner in which contemporary representations of the Vietnam War produce justifications for imperialist, racist practices. Finally, in "Pachuco Mickey," Ramona Fernandez makes an important, innovative contribution to Disney studies through an analysis of the technologies of globalism at EPCOT Center at Walt Disney World—the music, images, buildings, uses of star personae, etc.

Fernandez's essay, which comes at the end of the collection, serves to point out the weakness of so many of the sections. Virtually none of the other contributors pose any interesting methodological questions. Rather, with most of them concentrating on single films or groups of films, they depend on very traditional forms of textual analysis, in which meaning springs unproblematically from the text under consideration; neither audience, industrial practice, publicity, nor any other "non-filmic" category seems to have any importance. Further, the construction of the collection itself assumes the logical continuity among all Disney films. That is, in this volume, both *Pinocchio* and *Pretty Woman* can be discussed in the same terms, as reflective of Disney ideology. This may in fact be true, but the editors fail to make a persuasive argument for assuming the coherence of the Disney product from the 1930s to the 1990s, or the unity of films made under Walt's guidance or without

much of the founder's oversight, or produced shortly after his death in 1966, or following a series of corporate reorganizations over the last 30 years.

The problem, then, is less with the individual essays than with the editors' overall conception and execution of the project. Besides the fact that all the essays deal with Disney, there are no central arguments in the volume, no discussion of why these essays should be brought together or why the films, as opposed to other Disney products, should be given such priority. I am aware of a certain crankiness on my part, of being slightly put off by the fact that the editors and a fair number of the contributors seemingly entered a field without having paid their scholarly dues or done all of their homework. But besides having established a significant body of work that goes largely unacknowledged here, the best Disney scholars long ago moved beyond the kind of ahistorical assertions of unity between films and unproblematic assumptions about power that form the foundation of this collection.

ERIC SMOODIN

■ Eric Smoodin is a Visiting Associate Professor in the Film Studies Program at the University of California at Berkeley.

Vital Crises in Italian Cinema

Iconography, Stylistics, Politics

By P. Adams Sitney. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995. $45.00 cloth; $17.95 paper.

The intriguing title of this study of Italian cinema comes from an observation made in the early 1950s by Pier Paolo Pasolini. "Neorealism," declared the Italian poet and film-maker in a discussion of Fellini's *Le notti di Cabiria*, "was not a regeneration; it was only a vital crisis. . . . Now the sudden withering of neorealism is the necessary fate of an improvised, although necessary, superstructure; it is the price for a lack of mature thought, of a complete reorganization of the culture." Applying Pasolini's notion of "vital crisis" to the social and economic sphere, as well as that of cinema, P. Adams Sitney argues that postwar Italy has witnessed two such "crises": that of the late 1940s and early 1950s (which saw the flowering of neorealism) and a second "crisis" that came in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Arguing that this second crisis is felt in the films of Antonioni and Fellini as well as in those of Pasolini himself, Sitney remarks that at this time "all of the long-stagnant institutions of Italian public life were experiencing significant transformations" (7). Using these two critical periods to structure and, indeed, to frame his book, the author devotes one chapter (two in the case of Pasolini) to each of the great masters of postwar Italian cinema: Rossellini, Visconti, De Sica (and Zavattini), Fellini, Antonioni, and Pasolini (as well as shorter studies of Olmi and Rosi). Within each chapter—as the subtitle of this book suggests—the author situates the films explored in their political and social context even as he subjects them to an in-depth formal and iconographical analysis.

Despite its title, and despite the wealth of background information it offers, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* is not, I think, at its strongest when it comes to politics and ideology. It is true that it incorporates a series of penetrating remarks by critics and commentators which—like the citation by Pasolini that gives the book its title—bear upon the all-important relationship between politics and cinematic aesthetics. But often the author seems content to let these quotes stand on their own—that is, he does not address the critical issues they raise as deeply as one might have expected in light of the book's avowed aims. It is not clear, for example, whether or not he agrees with Pasolini that neorealism was destined to wither away because of a "lack of mature thought." Similarly, it is not evident whether or not he feels that Robert Warshow's critique of Rossellini's *Paisà* for its "sentimentality and falsehood" is justified. Nor can one be sure of his position regarding Lino Micciché's observation that in *La terra trema* Visconti may have "intended to denounce at once both the cruel established order and his own incapacity to do anything but contemplate it aesthetically" (77). For that matter, while the author suggests that Visconti explicitly evokes opera as a "gorgeous delusion," he does not take this one step further: he doesn't ask whether or not this is a "delusion" that Visconti himself adores and that, in some sense, also tells the "truth."

If, however, difficult political issues are not explored as fully as the title might have led readers to expect, Sitney is clearly in his element when it comes to "stylistics" and "iconography." His close reading of cinematic texts benefits from a keen sense of formal analysis (he is particularly good, I think, on Antonioni and Pasolini) and from a vast knowledge of Italian culture. For example, he consistently underscores the enormous debt that Italian cinema owes toward a centuries-old pictorial tradition and to Christian iconography. For different reasons, as the author points out, the latter often

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gets short shrift from critics on both sides of the Atlantic: for Italian critics, Christian iconography is all too obvious; for Americans, not obvious at all. Yet, as Pasolini observed in one interview, "Everybody in Italy is a Marxist, just as everybody in Italy is a Catholic." And, as the author makes very clear, Christian motifs and iconography are everywhere in these films. Sometimes, the allusions would be difficult to miss: the protagonists of Pasolini's early films take positions that inevitably recall those associated with the figure of Christ; Fellini's *La dolce vita* begins with a statue of Jesus dangling from a helicopter over the roofs of the eternal city. But the author also discerns far more subtle allusions that might well be hidden to most viewers; he discusses, for example, the transformation of the seven sacraments into "their political counterparts" in Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*; a rapid quotation from Dante's *Inferno* in *La dolce vita* leads him to an extended analysis of the important Dantean echoes in Fellini's film as well as its chain of "false benedictions." Sitney even finds a religious echo in the very secular films of Antonioni: the subject of a briefly glimpsed painting of Roman charity in *L'avventura* underscores, he argues, "the gaps between Roman and modern morality, Christian charity and psychosexual dynamics, iconography and pornography" (135).

A similar perceptiveness is brought to bear upon other iconographical aspects of these films. Turning from religious to secular art, Sitney comments upon interesting affinities between de Chirico's deserted cities (in which people and statues are dwarfed by the setting) and Antonioni's films of the early 60s, which use "strong verticals of arches, walls, doorways, and pillars to section the rectangular screen into two, three, or more zones of human action . . . and empty space" (139). He also examines how the changing face of postwar Italy is frequently inscribed in the very landscapes of these films. The presence of a prostitute on the freeway leading to the Rome airport in Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* is taken as a sign of a new-found affluence and of the growing importance of air traffic; *L'eclisse* is shown to be "very much a film about architecture and the growth of Rome."

I cannot say that I agree with all of P. Adams Sitney's observations and interpretations. I find it difficult to see, for example, how the author can speak of Pasolini's "didactic communism" when Pasolini's career was marked by his distance from the Communist Party and indeed, from all orthodoxies on the left as well as the right. And I think it too easy to attribute the "stylistic flourishes and the underlying anxious uncertainty of modernist forms" to affluence and political instability when they were part of a widespread moment of cinematic modernism that extended well beyond Italy's borders or her particular economic situation. I also found myself wishing that he would amplify certain remarks and observations. To a reader (like myself) who knows Franco Fortini mainly through his political writings, it would be helpful to know more about what the author calls Fortini's "mystical" Christianity. But these are cavils. *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* is, clearly, a major study of one of the great eras of Italian cinema and a valuable contribution to film history.

NAOMI GREENE

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Book Note

James L. Neibaur is a film historian.

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JAMES L. NEIBAUR

gets short shrift from critics on both sides of the Atlantic: for Italian critics, Christian iconography is all too obvious; for Americans, not obvious at all. Yet, as Pasolini observed in one interview, "Everybody in Italy is a Marxist, just as everybody in Italy is a Catholic." And, as the author makes very clear, Christian motifs and iconography are everywhere in these films. Sometimes, the allusions would be difficult to miss: the protagonists of Pasolini's early films take positions that inevitably recall those associated with the figure of Christ; Fellini's *La dolce vita* begins with a statue of Jesus dangling from a helicopter over the roofs of the eternal city. But the author also discerns far more subtle allusions that might well be hidden to most viewers; he discusses, for example, the transformation of the seven sacraments into "their political counterparts" in Rossellini's *Roma, città aperta*; a rapid quotation from Dante's *Inferno* in *La dolce vita* leads him to an extended analysis of the important Dantean echoes in Fellini's film as well as its chain of "false benedictions." Sitney even finds a religious echo in the very secular films of Antonioni: the subject of a briefly glimpsed painting of Roman charity in *L'avventura* underscores, he argues, "the gaps between Roman and modern morality, Christian charity and psychosexual dynamics, iconography and pornography" (135).

A similar perceptiveness is brought to bear upon other iconographical aspects of these films. Turning from religious to secular art, Sitney comments upon interesting affinities between de Chirico's deserted cities (in which people and statues are dwarfed by the setting) and Antonioni's films of the early 60s, which use "strong verticals of arches, walls, doorways, and pillars to section the rectangular screen into two, three, or more zones of human action . . . and empty space" (139). He also examines how the changing face of postwar Italy is frequently inscribed in the very landscapes of these films. The presence of a prostitute on the freeway leading to the Rome airport in Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* is taken as a sign of a new-found affluence and of the growing importance of air traffic; *L'eclisse* is shown to be "very much a film about architecture and the growth of Rome."

I cannot say that I agree with all of P. Adams Sitney's observations and interpretations. I find it difficult to see, for example, how the author can speak of Pasolini's "didactic communism" when Pasolini's career was marked by his distance from the Communist Party and indeed, from all orthodoxies on the left as well as the right. And I think it too easy to attribute the "stylistic flourishes and the underlying anxious uncertainty of modernist forms" to affluence and political instability when they were part of a widespread moment of cinematic modernism that extended well beyond Italy's borders or her particular economic situation. I also found myself wishing that he would amplify certain remarks and observations. To a reader (like myself) who knows Franco Fortini mainly through his political writings, it would be helpful to know more about what the author calls Fortini's "mystical" Christianity. But these are cavils. *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema* is, clearly, a major study of one of the great eras of Italian cinema and a valuable contribution to film history.

NAOMI GREENE

■ Naomi Greene teaches at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

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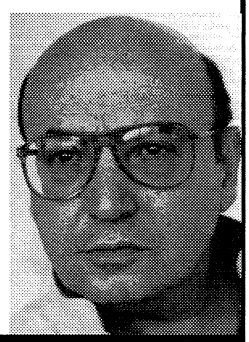

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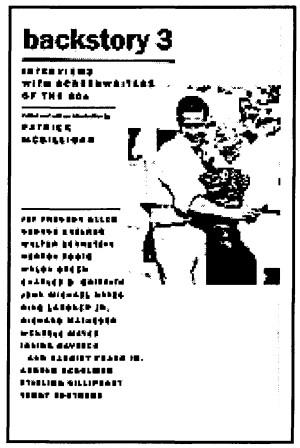

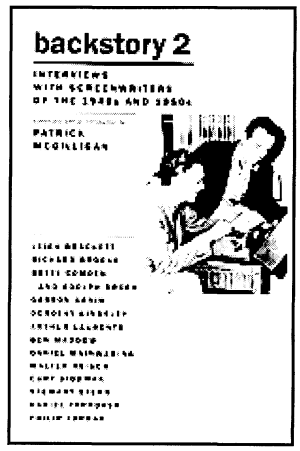

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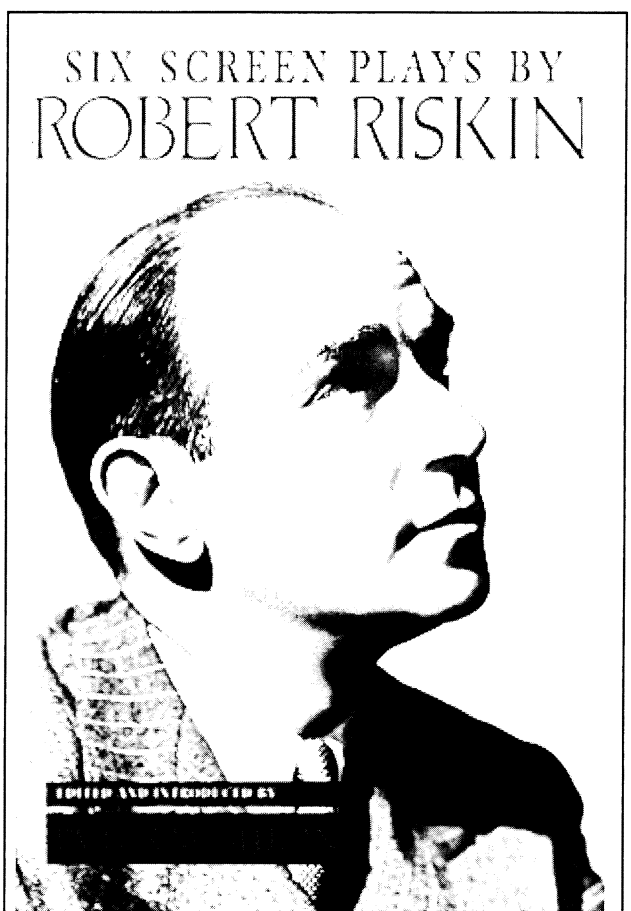

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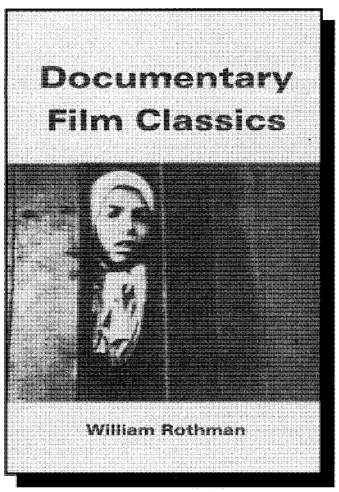

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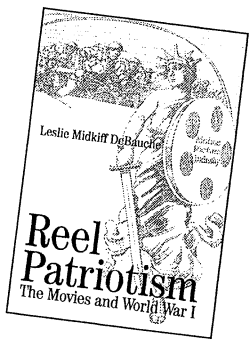

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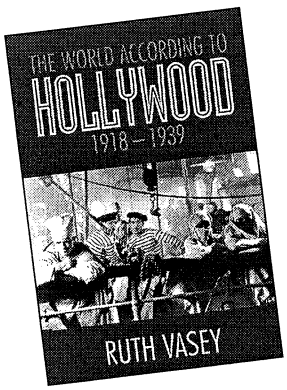

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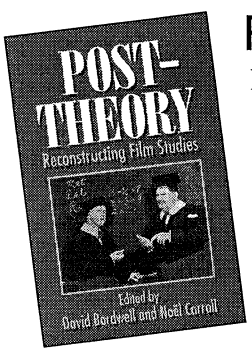

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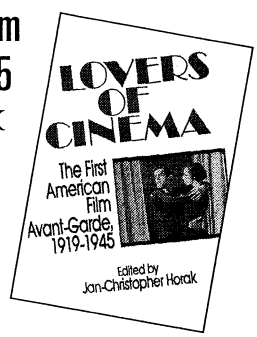

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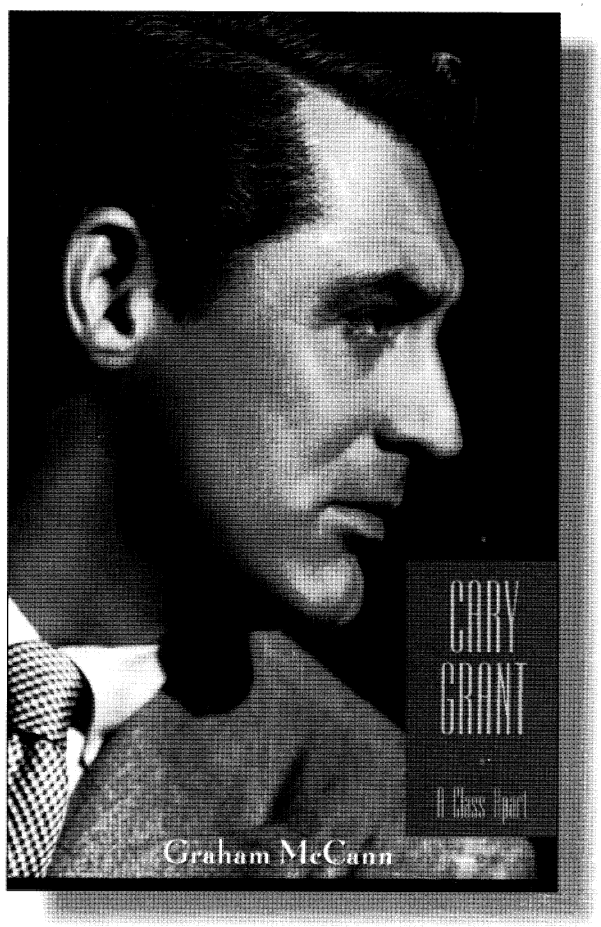

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